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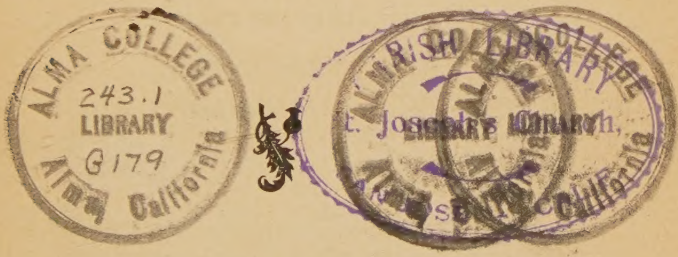
THE

LITTLE IMPERFECTIONS.

Translated from the French.

BY

Rev. Frederic P. Garesché, S. J.



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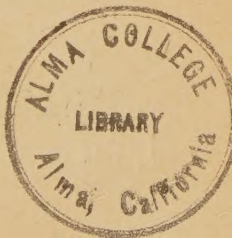

NIHIL OBSTAT.

S. Ludovici, die 9. Junii 1901.

F. G. Holweck,
Censor Theologicus.

IMPRIMATUR.

June 10, 1901.

✠John J. Kain,
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CONTENTS

Editor's Preface		5
Introduction		7
Letter I.	Antipathies and Rivalries	10
Letter II.	Partialities and the Spirit of Coterie	19
Letter III.	Littleness	31
Letter IV.	Self Love	40
Letter V.	Indolence	47
Letter VI.	The Table and Luxurious Living	60
Letter VII.	Improper Use of Money	69
Letter VIII.	The Love of Riches	83
Letter IX.	Sensitiveness	90
Letter X.	Irritability of Temper	99
Letter XI.	Curiosity	108
Letter XII.	Inordinate Love of Talking	116
Letter XIII.	Petty Cowardice	124
Letter XIV.	Rigidness	134
Letter XV.	Inconsistency	143
Letter XVI.	Secret Idolatry	154
Letter XVII.	Censoriousness—Insubordination	165
Letter XVIII.	Rancor	176
Letter XIX.	Levity of Mind	186
Letter XX.	Superficial Devotion	193
Letter XXI.	Life without Rule	203
Letter XXII.	Fear of Failures	214
Letter XXIII.	Obstinacy	224
Letter XXIV.	Indiscretion	235
Letter XXV.	Conclusion	244

PREFACE.

These letters were found, by accident, amid a heap of rubbish destined for the fire. It would have been a pity to let them perish. They appear to fill a want. Their subject matter is not, indeed, altogether new; but it embraces much that it is well to put before the Christian public often and in many ways.

Moreover, this sort of reading cannot but do many readers some good, and some readers much good. For there is no one of us so utterly indifferent to the blessed accomplishment of mending his ways, that he will not even see his imperfections when these are kindly pointed out to him. On the other hand, nobody is so perfect that he cannot be a bit better. We can all improve, at least some. Now these letters show us, gently but firmly, how even the very best among us can improve, if it were only a trifle. For even devout persons have their faults to which they are sometimes blind or at least a little too kind. On the other hand, it is only a truly pious person, or a

sincere friend who will dare to point out these faults to them, and enable these devout folks to remove their little vices. The writer of these letters is both the one and the other. His words impress you as the language of an interior man and his charity, like the simple grace of his words and manner, extends to the very tips of his fingers.

It would be surprising then, if these letters of his on The Little Imperfections did not effect some good. At any rate, it was with the conviction that they would help some earnest people to greater perfection, that they were rescued from the rubbish and the fire until, some day, leisure would permit to put them in shape for publication.

J. J. C.

INTRODUCTION.

A small volume was published in the last century, entitled *The Little Virtues*. Its object was to familiarize Christians with those virtues, apparently easy to practise, little by name, but great, in reality, that mingle in our daily acts of life, and render piety the sweetest, the most honorable thing in the world. My intention in presenting this treatise is to call the attention of my readers to some of those little defects from which the purest souls are not exempt, and to induce them to reflect upon the little imperfections which tarnish our most perfect actions, like motes, when exposed to the rays of the sun.

These small defects, these little imperfections, often indeed lead to deplorable results. In the soul which is afflicted by them (and who does not feel them in himself) they stifle the holy emotions of piety and dry up, so to speak, the sap of Christian life. They do not destroy the life of grace, because they reach not the gravity of mortal

sins, but they disturb the purity of its source. They produce besides, a lamentable effect upon those who approach certain pious persons, they give an unfavorable and false idea of devotion, and however slight these imperfections may be, the prejudiced and superficial become estranged from religion by their manifestation. Any one, however superficial, must, on the slightest reflection, admit the entire injustice of such a judgment, because religion, though it makes us better, still leaves us merely men, and not angels — but experience none the less proves that this false impression is general and that it does great mischief.

Most happy will the author be, if he can succeed in impressing even on one single soul, a horror of these little imperfections, with which he is about to occupy the attention of his readers. In these days we have need of a higher order of Christians than those who believe from habit, and teach and practise the Gospel with indolence or tepidity; for the conflicts in the midst of which the Church is engaged, demand energetic Christians — Christians, masters of themselves, and of their least imperfections,

and consequently, true saints; for the world is never saved but by saints. Besides, in the way of perfection the road is slippery, and the slightest fall dangerous. This or that fault, which in itself is but a little imperfection, if it be repeated, and habitual, may become the germ of serious faults. How many souls have begun by effeminacy and ended in voluptuousness, or by a slight vanity that degenerated into pride, and through this, into heresy or incredulity? Reclaim us, Lord, from these infirmities which too often we pass unnoted, or without the least scruple. Pluck out every root of these tenacious plants which are our passions and our sins, and our salvation will be certain. We beseech this grace of Thee through the Immaculate Virgin, under whose protection we place our work.

LETTER I.

Antipathies and Rivalries.

You will not have forgotten, my dear friend, how often, after having just left college we began to enter upon life and to become acquainted with men and things, we grieved together in our intimate conversations, to find that there was not always maintained among Christians, offspring of the same Church, nourished by the same doctrine, disciples of the same God, that intimacy, and that heartfelt sympathy which are, nevertheless, the ideal of the Christian life. Our souls were full of affection for our brethren in the faith: for those who, like ourselves, preserved from the delusions of incredulity, were dear to us by this rare community of sentiment and ideas. On seeing two Christians whom we did not know, we were always tempted to say, "See how they love each other." But experience soon obliged us to acknowledge that among the most just and reasonable natures, and the purest minds — among

hearts most devoted to all that is good, the enemy of God had sown those tares which are always so fruitful in divisions, and separations. This thought chilled our youthful hearts. We did not understand this terrible *oportet* which is never more fearful to us than when it is reproduced under similar conditions, and we prayed God to unite all Catholics, not only in faith, but in confidence and love.

And now, in spite of the years that have passed and which have brought with them the contingent of their sad experience, this thought still pursues me, and with it I begin my correspondence with you on our little imperfections.

In speaking here of antipathies and rivalries, I do not mean to treat of lasting rancor, or of those inveterate hatreds which are the offspring of satanic pride, and utterly destroy Christian charity, but only of those antipathies that are neither real nor profound and of those rivalries which do not pass beyond a certain extent, but which, though merely superficial, do not the less seriously divide minds and hearts.

Thus, for example, two Christians find themselves destined by Providence to pass

their lives together and, apparently, as friends. They are in the same family, or engaged in the same occupation, or, perhaps they fill some office in which it is of importance that they should act together and in accordance. These Christians have both good and noble qualities. They are pious, exemplary, sincerely virtuous. If in heart they were united they would edify their neighbor, they would cause religion to be loved by those who neither know nor love it — in a word, if their good qualities were completed by mutual cooperation, they would offer to the careless world a combination of precious virtues.

Unhappily it is not so. Instead of aiding, their only thought is to counteract, each other. Instead of casting a veil over defects, each labors only to expose the least imperfections of the other. If the first undertake a work, or make an advance, the second sets himself to overturn this work, or to render this advance abortive. Without proceeding to open detraction, or to calumny, they outvie each other in suspicions on a thousand minute points. Careless of exposing to public view their puerile divisions,

and contemptible rivalries, they act as if it were a necessity to unmask in each other a course of conduct dangerous to religion, and designs evidently ruinous to it. And what is the cause of all this discord—of all this noise? Each of these Christians will perhaps set forth pretexts for these things. But let him scrutinize his heart, and he will see at the bottom, that the sole cause of disagreement is a sentiment of rivalry, of antipathy, which probably he will not confess to himself, but which in the eye of God, is not the less certain.

But further, whence comes this antipathy? What has given birth to this constant and inveterate dissention? Most frequently the origin of all this evil is an imperceptible point, an atom, a nothing. It may be a pleasantry more or less witty. But with the good nature which we show to others, a piquant word, which does not even touch our character, should be easily pardoned. Then, again it may be a childish desire to be first in some small matter, so small indeed, that self-love alone could suspect its importance. In fine, can any one say what it is? Something, if possible, still more

frivolous; perhaps the face, the gait, the voice, are disagreeable and disturb the nerves, as it is occasionally conceded.

But the great evil, my dear friend, is, that when once this course is begun, it is continued, and advances but too rapidly. This antipathy, this rivalry, becomes a point of honor, and is assumed as an obligation, a positive duty. At first it is thought cowardly to give way to one who is not precisely an enemy, but certainly an antagonist. Soon the persuasion follows that it would be meanness to yield; until, at last, these miserable quarrels are mixed up with every thing, and the entire judgment is distorted, when a single sincere act of humility would banish them for ever.

Alas! these antipathies and rivalries oftentimes bring wretchedness into families and empoison their whole lives. Observe these two women, one almost the mother, the other almost the daughter, having the same name, because the first has given her son to the second. Towards all other members of the family, their friends, and neighbors, this mother and daughter-in-law are gentle and amiable; on great occasions they do not

hesitate to render services each to the other, to defend each other reciprocally, and to do it in all sincerity, but should a question arise of household management, or direction, or of precedence, forthwith a war breaks out and animosity begins. Father, husband, children, all in turn become excited against each other. If they are disposed to be violent, scenes of harshness are incessant; if of a more polished education, there are continual piques, murmurings, silence more difficult to endure than even open broils, or pouting, which disturbs every one and changes a home hitherto pleasant and joyous into an abode of bitterness and chagrin.

And yet if these antipathies or rivalries went no further! — but often they embroil the holiest people! How many times, in fact, have not religious communities, austere and pious, been divided among themselves by disputes without aim or object; or induced to enter into a rivalry with other communities, equally respectable, on points of wealth or influence? Alas! if they had exerted all their powers against sin, irreligion and heresy, Christians might have

been spared the spectacle of grievous divisions, and innumerable conversions would have been obtained. If, instead of directing their efforts towards a point already occupied by other laborers, they had sought to cultivate some portion of the vast fields of their common Father, still so neglected, how much evil might have been avoided, how much good obtained! And yet how often have we seen, and still see, parishes fall into rival factions, who think of nothing but how to counteract each other and mutually destroy their influence, instead of laboring in concert for the common good! And, finally, even amid the most threatening storms that assail the Church, have we not seen her most devoted children divided by unworthy antipathies, which, as a consequence, confirm and propagate the evil, and destroy the influence and action of good? In moments when they should have acted in unison, as with one body and one soul, where unity of sentiment was as necessary as that of faith, we have seen men whose convictions were sincere, whose devotion to the Church was immovable, waste their efforts instead of uniting them; less

preoccupied with the triumph of right than to know by whom it should triumph; and, in reality, less regardful of religion, than of their antipathies and personalities.

When reflecting on these results, and casting the eye around, we see how general is this evil, we are made to understand the tendencies and gravity of those antipathies to which we are inclined to attach so little importance, but which are so deeply seated in the heart. We begin to conceive a dread of them, and are ready to fall on our knees before God, and to say to Him, "My Lord and Father, Who hast commanded me to love all men as my brethren, aid me to overcome those antipathies so near to hatred, and so perilous to souls! Enable me to bear with the defects of my neighbor as I desire that he should bear with mine. Teach me to repulse no one, and, especially, never to oppose others in a narrow or egotistical spirit. As Thou hast commanded me to love my enemies, and sometimes Thou hast given me strength to obey, help me to love, in its fullest sense, my brethren in the faith, my friends in the truth, and never to be a cause of discord among them.

I desire, indeed, to love all who are devoted to Thy service, to unite with all good Christians; never to hinder anything that is good, or any effort that leads towards it. I am a useless servant, and instead of seeking to command or to govern, I ought to be happy to follow after those who labor to serve and to love Thee. If they have defects, I will forget them and think of my own, in consideration of the good which they wish to do; and resolve to practise abnegation and Christian union. I will endeavor to live in harmony with all Thy children and servants!"

LETTER II.

Partialities and the Spirit of Coterie.

I have treated, in my first letter, my dear friend, of antipathies and rivalries. I now, in a manner, continue the subject while discoursing with you on a kindred theme—viz: preferences and the taste for forming cliques, a defect which, though it is not called by its true name, has many resemblances to the first; for the human mind is so constituted, that, with the exception of characters who are either too proud or too fond of isolation, all feel the need of sympathy and seek friendships. Thus the more we are inclined towards antipathy, or rivalry in regard to certain individuals, the greater is the instinctive tendency to turn, as if to create a counterpoise, towards blind partialities.

You have sometimes studied works which treat of advanced Christian life, and particularly, that admirable book by Rodriguez, *Christian Perfection.* Perhaps, like myself,

you have been surprised at the care with which those moralists oppose, in religious communities, a great intimacy between its different members. At first, I fancied these counsels to be intended only for persons destined to a life of the highest perfection. I considered this detachment from the purest friendship as a step higher in that profoundly austere and mortified life which should be the groundwork of a true religious, and I could not understand why this point was so constantly enforced by the author. Deeper reflection gave me other views of the question. Doubtless it is one of the conditions essential to the existence of the community. For if preferences were established among certain of its members, if intimacies became too great among them, gradually circles would be formed within it; afterwards cliques would follow, and hence rivalries that would be subversive of all good; nay which would render it impossible, unless some remedy could be applied to the evil. Now that which is perilous in the most saintly communities, where the rule, the plan, the circumstances, discourage rivalries, is still more so in the world, in families,

and especially in Christian associations. It is to this point that I wish to direct your attention.

You are the father of a numerous family, my friend, you love all your children, but are you quite sure that no exclusive or blind preference exists for some of them more than for others? Is there not among them a Benjamin whom you distinguish above the rest, for whom you cherish a more tender affection, whom you reprove less frequently, in whom you tolerate failings which would not be excused in his brothers and sisters? If this be so, beware! Doubtless you imagine that this sentiment lies buried so deeply within your breast that it is perceived by none, and least of all by your children; you certainly believe that no one suspects it, since you are scarcely conscious of it yourself. But you are greatly in error; this preference has not escaped the observation of your other children; they have felt that your caresses of them have been less frequent, and less natural, and, consequently, their affection for their brother is diminished, and an opening is made in their childish hearts for jealousy,

that plague of families. And, be assured, this preference has not escaped the notice of your *Benjamin.* He feels that he can venture where his brothers dare not go; that the rule is less severe for him than for the others; and he has abused it by airs of superiority, of authority, which are so quickly bred in children, and are so much to be regretted. Your wish was to increase his happiness, and you have compromised it, on the one hand, by placing a barrier between him and his brothers, and, on the other, by stimulating in him the dangerous passion of pride.

Our friend, Octavius, has fallen into an error of another character. He and his wife have numerous relatives with whom they live on good terms; but he has a singular manner of liking one to the prejudice of another. When he became attached to one of his brothers-in-law, he fancied that he could not better prove his affection, than by sacrificing all the others, and by seeking to create a party in his favor, as if he were engaged on a question of state. The result of this conduct has been to separate his relatives from each other, who, until then,

had lived in union; to create disagreements amongst them, to substitute coldness for confidence, distrust for intimacy, and, finally, to destroy the happiness of all. How much better for this family if Octavius had not indulged this wretched partiality, or if he had had a heart large enough to love one of his relatives without sacrificing the others! And does not the pious Adela, also, fall into this imperfection? You know, as well as I do, the services which the excellent pastor of her parish has rendered to her family; he converted her husband, and preserved the faith of her children. Nothing, therefore, can be more legitimate than the gratitude of Adela; but evidently this gratitude surpasses its true limits, for her attachment prevents her from recognizing merit in any but her pastor. She believes that he alone is capable of being her confessor, or of maintaining her in the way of salvation, and his sermons alone are agreeable to her. Yet, if this were all, it might be excused. Certain souls have, in fact, the power to impart to others special graces and privileges. But Adela neither can nor will hear any other priest spoken of, and her

religion is centred in a man. If this good pastor were to be removed from her parish, she would detest his successor, who, nevertheless, would have no power to do otherwise than accept the position assigned him. She would desert the church of which she is now a constant attendant at every office. Finally, if he should die, with what repugnance would she not accept any other guide for her conscience! This is certainly a deplorable caprice; but, unfortunately, how many Adelas are there not among Christians, and, as a consequence, what disputes, what difficulties, in parishes! How often, too, are not offenses given to ecclesiastics, who, though pious and entitled to all respect, are after all only men, and like others inclined to listen more willingly to those who flatter, than to those who contradict them! And, in this way, how much good is obstructed or rendered impracticable even in the best parishes! Truly, when we reflect upon it, we are frightened at the amount of evil that can be done, without any intention or even suspicion of it.

And again, is it not surprising to find among certain Christians, such inflexible

prejudices for or against this or that religious community? Some persons attach themselves to a certain order in the Church, and regard all others as useless, if not injurious; others prefer another order, and condemn all who are not connected with it. What pests are not these partialities and cliques! Let us then be largely and strongly Christian—let us love the Church and all the institutions that she consecrates and approves, without exception. Let us love, first of all, the Sovereign Pontiff, the keystone of the hierarchical arch; let us love the Bishops, the chief pastors of our dioceses; let us love the pastors of our parish, and our local clergy — and finally, the men and women of the religious orders who labor zealously in the vineyard of the Lord. Alas, this vineyard has so many places lying waste for the want of laborers! Briars and thorns grow within it in such abundance, that for the love we bear to God our Master, we ought not too critically to examine who removes these briars and thorns, but only to see they are effectually uprooted; and, whoever devotes himself to the work, ought to be dear to us, and regarded as meriting all

our affection, all our love, without distinction of person or estate. In a word, let us love all that is good, and fear only evil, and those who practise it.

There are also Christian works to which these deplorable vices are especially destructive. Some time since, I heard that one of these works of charity in a neighboring village, after a long season of prosperity, was declining. I wished to discover the cause and sought for information, not from an idle curiosity, but with the desire, if possible, to apply a remedy. What was the result? I was told that there were two parties in this work; one preferred the president, the other the treasurer — that from petty bickerings, clique against clique, with a sort of warfare at the needle's point, each refusing to oblige the other in the most trivial matters, when concession alone would have been the proper line of conduct, a marked coldness had ensued and the work was made to suffer the consequences. As a friend to both parties, I labored to bring about a reunion, which was the less difficult since there was really no cause for dissention. In seeking for the source of the

evil, I discovered that the whole of this petty conflict originated in too exclusive, or ill conceived friendships, that the two parties had opposed and thwarted each other, not on account of any difference of ideas or views, but to exalt, the one, the president, the other, the treasurer. If they had loved their work more, and the individuals engaged in it less, if their hearts had been larger, and their affections less narrow, the work would have continued to progress. In a meeting, in which I had succeeded in bringing the two parties together, I therefore took occasion, while making a text of the past, to inveigh against cliques and exclusive friendships; and availed myself of their confidence in me as a stranger, to represent to them that nothing was more contrary to the Christian spirit — that we should do good for its own sake, and not for the honors it might confer on a friend. And as they knew me to be entirely disinterested in the question, it seemed that my harangue made so good an impression, that they determined to act thenceforth together with unity of heart and mind—*corde uno et anima una.*

Now, what is the best means of avoiding

this imperfection; so common yet so inveterate, that we scarcely perceive its existence in ourselves? Doubtless there are several of great efficacy, but they demand energy of will. The first is to avoid hasty judgments. Sympathies like antipathies are instinctive, and take neither time nor trouble to reflect. Sometimes, indeed, they regard reflection as a lapse of friendship. But Christian wisdom exacts greater reserve. She grants affection all that can be given to it, but she never sacrifices the rights of truth. She appreciates all the qualities of her friends, but at the same time she does justice to those of other men, who are called *neighbors*. She does not love to descant upon the defects of those dear to her, but, in virtue of Christian charity, she also draws a veil over the faults of others who are not her intimates. To preserve a well balanced judgment, to avoid a precipitation which may give cause for regret, appears to be the first means of meeting the dangers of ill placed preferences. The second is to maintain great rectitude in our intentions. Why are we so often mistaken? Because, instead of

examining things in themselves, and for themselves, we regard them in their relations to our personal interests and petty prejudices. Too often in friendships as well as in family relations, and in good works, we are guided by selfish motives. Thus with whatever pretext we may delude ourselves, we have, in fact, only our own advantage or personal motives in view, and by an inevitable consequence, we see everything through the obscure medium of self love. Let us, on the contrary, cherish none but right and pure intentions, let us approach God in all simplicity, and without reference to ourselves, let us seek what is good, for its own sake, and not for any advantages that it may bring to ourselves, and then we shall find in our appreciation of our neighbor, a rectitude of judgment, a security, even at the first view, which will deliver us from this imperfection which is the subject of our discussion.

May we, my dear friend, you as well as myself, experience the efficacy of these means. May we escape these petty weaknesses which imperceptibly glide into the best hearts, where they disturb the happi-

ness of our lives, and neutralize the edification that we owe to our neighbors! I am confident we shall find contentment within ourselves, and that God will be pleased with our disinterestedness, simplicity and purity of intention.

LETTER III.

Littleness.

Since it is your desire, my dear friend, we will continue our conversation upon human imperfections. Alas! they are not less numerous than the infirmities of our bodies, and if we are frank with ourselves, there is not, perhaps, a single point in our souls where we are not obliged to recognize them. Next after exaggerated antipathies and partialities, we will to-day discourse upon littlenesses. A natural transition conducts us towards them. The true Christian should have a large heart, preoccupied, in the first place, with Heaven, the eternal interests of his soul, the success or dangers of the Church; he cannot occupy his mind with puerilities. Little things, the trivial incidents of life, the thousand nonentities of the world, must appear to him as childish, — as grains of sand that may impede the progress of an ant, but are insufficient to attract the notice of a man. What in

truth, to him whose meditations are of God, and His infinite perfections, or of the joys and pains of the future life, are the infinitesimal trifles of which the whole of human existence is composed? What are the infinitely small, beside the infinitely great? Reason and faith both teach us this lesson. And yet the wisest and most pious are too often sensible of the existence of this infirmity of the soul that abases them to the level of puerilities which, in others, excite their mirth. And yet they yield to their influence. Having come forth from prayer or meditation, or from the august sacraments which had led them to the contemplation of the most sublime truths, they fall back, through natural weakness, into those contemptible preoccupations, which, at the foot of the altar, seemed so empty, and so worthy only of disdain. Let us examine these infirmities more closely; for this will go far towards effecting a cure.

The life of all men, even of the most elevated rank, must necessarily be made up of details; it is impossible always to be heroic, or magnanimous; and if only to humble us, we are forced to take our part of the thou-

sand trifles that form the sum of existence. But these trifles which we are obliged to accept, and practise, and live with, we must take at their true measure, and not at an imaginary one; they must be kept in their proper place, and that is in the lowest rank. We are not to allow them to possess a consideration or value to which they can have no pretence.

Yet it is our misfortune, often to convert these trifles into objects of the first importance, and elevate them above things really of the highest consequence; we do this every day in our families, in the world, in Christian life, and its works. Let us enquire into some details that will convince us of this.

We love our family, and our home; but, have we learned how to lay aside the narrowness of character or the weakness to take offence which may be awakened at any moment, and that causes so much unhappiness in many households? We cherish those whom God has given as the companions of our lives, but do we not continually prefer to them puerilities, or follies for which we ought to blush, if, true to our-

selves, we dared to confess them? Must not every one think, as we think, and act, or move, according to our will? The least dissent upon some trifling subject, does it never become the cause of sulkiness or bad humor, or, perhaps, of quarrels? Yet, the whole may arise about some pastime which one prefers, and the other refuses, such as a longer or shorter walk, more or less to his or her taste; or, it may be a difference respecting the hour, or the dishes of a repast; or of the placing of furniture, all of which are of no consequence, and whatever side may be taken, can neither compromise the pleasures of life, nor its interests. But these insignificant things are looked upon through a magnifying medium, and are made of consequence until they become subjects for sounding words of authority on the one part, and of a proper independence on the other; and thus by the action merely of littleness, arise offences, coldness and discord. For the sake of charity, let us exercise a little more largeness of spirit, a little more forgetfulness of these weaknesses; then harmony will soon be restored of itself, and with the solid and unappre-

ciable enjoyments of family and friends, life will become easy and cheerful.

Alas! in the world, how much there is of littleness! We have, it is true, a position in it to be supported, a consideration to be preserved; these are right, but it is not, therefore, necessary to degrade one's self by mean punctiliousness. Alas, how many people, estimable in other respects, occupy themselves unceasingly, in observing whether they are placed at the precise level to which their merits entitle them; if they have been spoken of with more or less respect, if any one has failed towards them in any of the usages due from society? Nothing renders a man or woman more ridiculous or more wearisome to others than this punctilious spirit, and yet it is common, even among truly devout people. They make to themselves monsters of imperceptible pins; they are unhappy through trifles, which are unworthy of notice, and, then, endeavor to inflict upon others injury for injury, stubbornness for stubbornness, sordidness for sordidness, or assume a coldness that is meant for dignity, but which is merely ridiculous, until, in spite of

many solid qualities, these mistaken persons end by being disliked and severely judged by the world, with more enemies than friends. A little humility, a little good nature, would dissipate all these unpleasant fancies. Let us endeavor, my dear friend, in the intercourse of life, to cultivate these precious virtues. All around us will be happier for it, and ourselves first of all.

Another evil arising from this false importance given to insignificant objects, is, that it often ends by a devotion of the whole life to them! You invite a worthy man to enter upon some useful enterprise; he assures you that his time is wholly occupied, and he can do no more. Look into the nature of his occupation, and you may find that this busy man collects butterflies or gathers autographs — pastimes harmless enough, but which, after all, are mere pastimes, and yet have taken the place of the important works to which his higher faculties called him. How many collectors of butterflies do we not find, my dear friend, in this world in which we live! and how frivolities predominate in it!

Yet never was there a time when Christians had greater need to be men, and true men, of grave purposes and full of courage!

But, even among those who love what is right and practise good works, what efforts are necessary to preserve oneself from littlenesses! God forbid that I should deny that many small things must enter into the good works of Christians, and that they should love them though they are little, and apparently unworthy of us. In the eyes of the world, it is a small matter to visit a few poor people and impart to them words of consolation. We do not regenerate society nor make a great impression on the wise or powerful of the world, when we quietly mount a rickety staircase or restore order in a misguided family. All these are of small, very small importance in the opinions of statisticians or scientific men; nevertheless, they are good works, which must never, on any account be abandoned. But this is the point of importance; if these works are small they must be performed lovingly, but not with littleness—they must be done with

humility, but not with a narrow spirit. We should love the poor whom we visit; we should dispense to them with punctuality, with pleasure, the supplies which we have received for them; we should neglect no occasion to render services to them or their children, yet we should not allow ourselves to become so much absorbed in them as to be blind either to the wants or the good qualities of other poor people; nor should we become so attached to them as to exclude others or consider it as a personal affront if we fail to obtain all that we desire for them. For if we went so far, how many must be utterly destroyed, because, the demands of each jarring against the requisition of all, disputes, conflicts, would follow, where all should concur in good understanding and union.

Let us, then, my dear friend, encourage largeness of heart, and wage a war of extermination against littleness. Let us bear with it in others, and meet it with generosity and true greatness of spirit. These will be the surest means of cure for the imperfections of our hearts, as well as of those around us, for it is impossible to approach

men of exalted views, who treat questions in their broadest and most dignified sense, without being impressed by their influence, and feeling within ourselves an elevation of thought and sentiment of which we scarcely deemed ourselves capable.

LETTER IV.

Self-Love.

There is no Christian, my dear friend, who is not convinced that pride is the most serious wound which original sin has inflicted on our souls, and who does not find it at the bottom of all our evil inclinations, where it develops, and causes them to bring forth their worst fruits. Thus pride is the father of vengeance, of hatred, and of ambition.—It is also pride that gives birth to the insatiable love of gold and worldly wealth, which is called avarice; and even when its impure traces do not appear so openly, the attentive observer can detect it with certainty in all our basest passions. A christian, therefore, cannot too cordially detest this vice, nor too closely apply his efforts to discover it in himself, nor labor with too much diligence, to vanquish and uproot it. Since our discourse is upon our little imperfections only, I shall not here treat of pride in its greater excess, when it

urges its victim to homicide, or to a deadly war against a brother, or makes the man detestable who yields to it. We will only discuss that love of self, which is certainly pride, but on a lower level; which does not render a man odious, but ridiculous and exacting; which does not destroy piety, but dries up its most delicate fruits. Self-love, in the rigorous sense of the word, is an evil common to all mankind, even to the best, for none but saints are exempt from its baneful attacks. It takes the form of pride in many sincere christians, who believe themselves humble. Let us occupy a few moments in the examination of its nature, in the hope of correcting it in ourselves.

Nothing is more rare, nothing more admirable, than a man who thinks not of himself; who acts only from a sense of duty, and not from motives of self-interest; who, when he speaks, has no other end in view than the frank expression of his thoughts. When we chance to meet with such a character, we love, we admire and attach ourselves to him with a respectful affection.

The love of self produces qualities totally opposite to these, and unhappily, my dear friend, when I look within my soul, I feel that it is filled with it to overflowing, and that there is scarcely an action in which traces of it may not be found. But as public confession is no longer practised in the Church, I dispense with my own experiences, and use only general terms.

In life, then, there are great, as well as small sacrifices to be made. Of the former I shall not now speak. But the latter, how difficult they become in the presence of self-love! We have acquired a habit: it is troublesome to others, who can scarcely endure it: to change it would cost nothing, either in health or expense. A spirit of abnegation would yield without a moment's hesitation, but we not only prefer our own pleasure to the comfort of another, and refuse to renounce it, but cling to it all the more, because others oppose it, and thus foment in the family, disputes and quarrels that cast a gloom over its very existence. A little self-abnegation would have prevented all this.

Then some persons like to do good: they are afflicted on seeing the poor, the ignorant, the irreligious. It is their pleasure to give assistance to one, and to endeavor to convert the other, but it is their intention that their good works shall be known and praised, and if this applause fail, they will do less. Evidently self-love is mingled with their good deeds like a dangerous serpent among the most odoriferous flowers.

Again, men undertake admirable charities with the greatest zeal, and aid them with generous gifts, but it is in the hope of being known, and of enjoying a prominent place in them. Meanwhile they depreciate or oppose the efforts of others, or cast suspicion on their motives, without in the least suspecting themselves, and if they succeed in withdrawing their resources to apply them to their own works, they would regard it as laudable. What is this but a manifestation of self-love? Experience shows but too well its mischievous results. Whoever penetrates beyond the surface of most works of charity will perceive that their principle obstacles are due less fre-

quently to bad or unbelieving men, than to persons who may be considered, on the whole, good christians, but who misunderstand them, and by a petty vanity, of which they are unconscious, take offence at something, and thus fall into those antipathies and rivalries mentioned above and of which pride is evidently one of the chief causes.

Men often engage in affairs connected with public interests with conscientious devotion, because they love their country and desire to promote its prosperity. But here again what vigilance must be observed to guard the heart from the invasion of self-interest, either in matters of a general nature, or in pecuniary affairs — in a word, from the love of self that rarely abandons us. How much good might be done with more abnegation, more indifference to merely personal considerations, more detachment from ourselves! How many useful things might be accomplished if the spirit of rivalry did not render them abortive, and above all how much evil might be avoided if well disposed people would only lay aside their prejudices!

From these hints we may readily discern

how all pervading is the spirit of self-love, and how, in the judgment of God, it tarnishes actions which seem the most pure. And now we may readily understand why it is that the most pious and valued authors inculcate upon all christians the duty of practising humility so perfectly as to aim at an entire oblivion of self. Men of the world, on reading their works, are wont to charge these theologians with exaggerated views, — that they abase human nature, that they tend to an unhealthy mysticism; But if we reflect, and give the subject a conscientious examination, we must acknowledge that these counsels are but the expression of a simple truth. For, in proportion as we fail to immolate this self-seeking, this preoccupation with our own interests, our enjoyments or our pride, in proportion as self-examination and the consequent knowledge of our own weakness and imperfections fail to make us despise and even hate ourselves, after the manner of the saints; we remain selfish and incapable of true or profound devotion; and whatever virtue we may have in appearance, cannot become meritorious, for we cramp it and make it impossible.

To conquer this imperfection great humility is demanded, and also great watchfulness. Pride loves to surround itself with illusions, and it succeeds but too well in leading inadvertent minds to mistake error for truth. Let us then watch over our actions, and calmly, but without weakness, disentangle our most secret motives, in order to discover what is good or bad—to scrutinize all that is undertaken with pure intentions, and all that we are doing only for ourselves; and we may have the assurance that with the Divine assistance, which must always be asked, this study of our souls will enable us promptly, if not to destroy, at least to diminish more and more that self-love by which all virtue becomes tainted with serious imperfections.

LETTER V.

Indolence.

To-day, my dear friend, we will touch upon a defect which is seen everywhere, yet few undertake to correct it. I mean indolence. I do nothing wrong, certain Christians will say — my morals are pure, I am innocent of all fraud or injustice. I offer to God the honor and worship which the Church teaches and prescribes: I see no reason why I ought to change my life.

You say that you do no wrong. I grant it in the sense which you attach to it; but in another sense it is not true, for you do no good, and you are that barren tree which the Husbandman orders to be cut down. You do nothing wrong: but this is not enough, for you do nothing; and to do nothing is to live in the neglect of the order of Providence, and of one of the express commandments of God.

To do nothing is a fault, and, to speak the truth with all frankness, it is, unhap-

pily, one of the faults in which many Christians indulge themselves without scruple. Having vanquished the impetuosity of the passions by which most men are led astray, they fancy that they are permitted to slumber, not indeed in vain, but in a species of idleness which may easily degenerate into a species of wrong-doing, or, at least, into a culpable indifference. Let us dwell for a moment on this point, in order to comprehend it — and then enter more into detail. You rise in the morning: and, to begin, at what time? While the man of prayer has long since begun to praise the Lord, while the laborer is at his work, and too often wicked men are eagerly battling against the right, are you not still asleep? Do you not prolong your repose far beyond the requirements of your health? Do you not begin the day with luxury and idleness? Speak, for your conscience cannot deceive you on this point.

At length you rise, but instead of preparing with promptitude to clothe yourself, *you make your toilette.* In your day this should be merely a tiresome duty, which ought to be speedily dispatched. For you it

is an occupation, it is almost an affair of consequence. You study to accomplish it with art and refinement. Under the pretext of being like other people, you give it double, treble the time that should legitimately be allotted it. And this weakness is not restricted to women, it is found even among men, to whom, by right, such trifles should be indifferent. Alas, how much time is lost by these follies, which will be bitterly deplored, not only at the hour of death, and in the dread day of judgment, but even in this life, for their evil influence both in family and state!

You are dressed, and I hope you have employed at least some minutes in elevating your heart to God in prayer, to place the day under His protection. But do your occupations now begin? Without waste of time, do you seek your place in your office, if engaged in business, or, if a father or mother, do you set about the superintendence of your household? In a word, whatever may be your duties, do you proceed to fulfil them, not with indolence or indifference, but with all the energy, zeal, and perseverance of which you are capable?

This is what you ought to do precisely because you are a Christian. For to a Christian, labor is at once a penance and a joy, an expiation imposed by the law of God, and a satisfaction of the conscience. Is this your habit? If so, I congratulate you, but unfortunately it is rare.

When I listen to the sounds that come from the world, I often hear, even from Christians, expressions like these — "such a one is a worthy man and very honest: I would willingly employ him as an advocate, or agent or furnisher, but he never finishes anything, or he is not careful, or he has no capacity." That there is often injustice in these judgments, I admit; yet there is also some foundation for them. And what is the reason?

Can it be that true religion is incompatible with honorable employment? Does it narrow the mind, or stifle the spirit? No, never. For thank God we can find the most solid examples to the contrary in thousands of Christians. The objection lies in the indolence of those persons to whom we allude. It is important therefore, to correct it.

But, it may be said, religion is opposed

to the feverish activity of certain individuals engaged in industrial pursuits: it does not attach so much importance to earthly affairs, but gives more to divine things. I acknowledge this charge without hesitation. But if it condemns and brands the ardor of our speculators, or stock-jobbers, or the craftiness which ends in imposture; it counsels and ordains application to business, constant occupation, entire devotion to duty. And if each Christian brought these virtues into his profession, an immense good would be done to the incredulous and indifferent world.

It is sometimes a matter of surprise in a small village, that the greatest influence is not possessed by the man who is most honored and respected, but rather, by one of doubtful reputation and suspected morality. The same is often repeated on a larger scale in populous towns. At first, this seems inexplicable: further examination makes it easy of comprehension. It is because too often the honorable man is quiet, too quiet — never interferes with matters of public interest, and lives retired within himself and for himself, while the other, occu-

pied far more in reality with his own interests than with those of the public, makes of the latter mere stepping stones to serve his own purposes, and with this intention agitates and stirs up whatever he knows will be of utility in his village, county or district, and through this activity, becomes useful, indispensable. Between him and the honorable but inactive man, the choice is quickly made. His influence increases, while that of the other falls into decay, and at the same time the influence of evil becomes stronger, and that of good declines in proportion.

The sloth of good people, their idleness, their inactivity, are a shame to themselves, and a public misfortune. These faults among people once religious, lead them to tepidity, to indifference, and sometimes even to impiety. Had this spirit of indolence been shaken off, it could not have been so. What a fearful responsibility is incurred before God!

But, we may say, it is not possible for me to do anything important—I am too inexperienced, too ignorant, too little known. In the first place this excuse is not always

true. Besides, good has been done by very obscure men, and evil also. But let us suppose that Divine Providence has given you nothing in particular to do, are not "the poor with you always?" Is the Church in need of no service which you can supply? In general, is there not a family, large or small, a business, more or less extensive, which have relative importance? Have you not the care of your children, of your household? Here are sources of occupation in every position in life, and at all times. Yet you want more?

Let us pause at this point: it is well worthy of profound consideration. Among the most serious duties of parents, is that of educating the children whom God has given them in the Christian life. It is their duty, not only to watch over their health, superintend their instruction and promote the interests of their future, and position in life, but to correct their defects, and develop their good qualities, to instruct them in their religion: in a word, it is their solemn duty to rear them to be true and solid Christians. But the work is not the affair of a day nor a year, it is in fact a life-

long work. Until the young girl has grown into womanhood with her character well formed — until the young men has been provided with principles sufficiently solid to do battle against the temptations of life, the father and mother must watch, encourage, repress, give good example, and allow themselves not a moment of repose. Now, is it thus that most parents understand their duty? Education is an arduous labor, yet they indulge themselves in repose, or amusements! The study of characters is a serious occupation: they pass their days in trifling. Meanwhile, in such indolent hands, their children raise themselves as they please; that is to say, very badly. Not having been taught to labor in their childhood, they have formed habits of idleness, and instead of being vigorous students, they become lazy scholars, learning only from caprice, working only when they feel disposed for it, which means learning nothing, working not at all. Consequently an empty life ensues which will probably weigh them down and make them a burden to others. Not having been reproved for their defects, nor accustomed to habits of

obedience, they become wilful, ill tempered, arrogant, and selfish. All these germs of evil are fully developed, until the good is smothered. Age does not make them better; for they do not, like the Divine Infant, grow in wisdom and knowledge. They advance in life without improvement, until at length it is difficult to believe that these persons so incapable, so worthless, so unlike Christians, can be the offspring of distinguished religious families.

What is the cause of this? The indolence, the neglect of their parents. How can they answer for it before God?

The rich and fortunate of the world have other duties: for they have to make a noble use of their fortune and to preserve it by a wise administration. Yet, unhappily, how often do we see entire estates, the fruit of worldly wisdom and economy, ruined by neglect and disorder! The possessors of fortune should take charge of their own affairs, keep account of their situation, look after the debts and see not only that their expenses do not exceed their revenue, but also that there is nothing wasted. But this charge would require labor. for accounts

must be kept, and settled, and they shrink from these slight efforts with an incredible carelessness. It is not a sin, they say. But it is a fault that may lead to disastrous consequences to their families, which may cost them their position, and compromise the establishment of their children. Ought not these results to weigh upon their conscience? It needs no prophetic vision to affirm that sooner or later they will have cause for bitter self-reproach for their neglect. Would it not be wisdom to avoid these regrets by an activity more conformable to duty?

To say all that this subject demands, would lead me too far: for I should have to pursue an examination into the public functions of the agent, the laborer, the physician, the advocate, in short, of all who are charged with the interests of others, and who have to render an account to God and their conscience. But we must come to a close, and I will confine myself to one point more which troubles me particularly, one on which Christians have much to reproach themselves. I mean their co-operation in good works.

Among Christians truly worthy of the

name, there are some, and they are the most numerous, who keep aloof from good works. They say: "To help and visit the poor is not my business. It belongs to the clergy, to the Sisters of Charity, to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. To convert them is the duty of the priest, not mine. I give my proportion of the collections that are made, and this is enough for me." I confess that I cannot listen to such language without feeling deeply wounded. What! in the midst of so much misery, to be so indifferent to it! They repeat: "it is no business of mine," and with this pretence, they give some small sums during the year, when, if they would see the poor, they could not refuse to be liberal and might render immense service. There is so much incredulity and irreligion arising from ignorance; yet they would leave the whole charge of this burden to the clergy, notwithstanding the paucity of their numbers, and the prejudices nourished against them by most sinners, when the zealous efforts of all, laics, and ecclesiastics, men and women, young and old, ought to be directed to the work of leading back to their God these mis-

guided sheep, to loosen their perjudices, to enlighten their ignorance! Truly, such conduct is inconceivable among Christians, and it can be attributed only to a deplorable levity of spirit, or an unpardonable indolence. In giving this frank, even severe expression of my thoughts, I devoutly hope to provoke reflections which will lead to a change of conduct.

At the side of these Christians, there are others more generous, who consent to devote themselves to good works, but how feebly they do it! How they fear to fatigue themselves too mueh, or to undertake too much! How often they fancy they are giving too much time to the poor, and upon the slightest pretext, excuse themselves from attending meetings, or from accomplishing the work others have undertaken! For a drive, or a party of pleasure, or an evening's entertainment, they fear neither heat, nor cold, nor rain, nor snow; but in the service of the poor, they are scrupulously careful of themselves. Then, and only then, they must think of their health, not to impair it by any useless excess of zeal. They must especially be careful not to omit any duties

of the family, or politeness, which at other times would easily be dispensed with. Here again, my dear friend, there is evidently food for reflection for you and me and all Christians, for in the midst of charities there may enter many illusions, many deficiencies even in that zeal which seems to be most occupied.

Let us be courageous and active. Let us not trouble ourselves about our fatigues, but from morn till night let us be full of activity as parents, as public men, as disciples of charity. When we are weary let us remember that men labor harder in the service of the world; if we have much to do, let us regulate our time well, because we know that this will double its value, and recall the means employed by an indefatigable laborer, who said that when fatigued he recruited his strength by substituting a different work, thus changing its character, and we shall not have to reproach ourselves with having buried the talent which the Lord of the Household has confided to us.

LETTER VI.

The Table and Luxurious Living.

I would not be, as you well know, my dear friend, a severe moralist, nor propose as a rule to ordinary Christians the counsels which the Church gives to certain individuals, of a life of fasting and of the austerities of the cloister and the desert. This life, hard as it is, is worthy of all our admiration, and woe to the Christian, who, from levity, thoughtlessness, or weakness, turns it into ridicule, as you and I have sometimes witnessed. But if it be worthy of the admiration of all, it is not to be imitated by all, and legitimate reasons which include position, duty, and especially health, leave only a small number who can give themselves to it.

But, on the other hand, in place of the austerities of cenobitic fasts, I find excesses of the table; there are men, and in great numbers, for whom it is an occupation of the first class, who give all their thought to the repast they are about to take, for whom

a good dinner is a pleasure which nothing can surpass, for whom the anticipation of a fast day is a horrible, a most cruel penance. The study of good eating is for them more than a pastime, it is a science, an art. To be considered a connoisseur of wines more or less delicate, is a gratification to their vanity; in short, life is measured by the good dinners which they give or receive, and the expenses of the table are honorable above all others.

That this should be the fault of people who never think of God, and dwell only among the enjoyments of this lower world whose horizon is bounded by this life, it is possible to believe; yet, even from a purely human point of view, it seems puerile, gross, approaching the brute creation to "make their god of their belly," to quote the energetic expression which I should hardly dare to reproduce, if it were not used in the Holy Scriptures. For a man, a reasonable creature, who is lord of the creation — who governs all nature, who, through his science, follows and predicts the course of the stars while he impels the elements to serve him — it seems to me most pitiful to

degrade himself to the level of such puerilities: and, as it has been justly said, to live to eat, and not to eat to live. But for a sincere Christian, for a person devoted to works of charity, this defect seems to me incomprehensible and, in fact, inexcusable.

The Christian knows, with full assurance, that after this life there is another; that after his death God will demand a severe reckoning of his conduct, and not only of the evil of which he has been guilty, but also of the good which he has omitted to do. He has read in the Holy Scriptures the parable of the self-indulgent rich man who fared sumptuously every day, and of whom no other sin is recorded, except his neglect of the poor beggar Lazarus. He knows that near him, in his street, in his house, perhaps at his door, there are needy people, who would feast upon the food which he rejects as wholly unfit for himself. He assists at the offices and prayers of the Church, which constantly recommend fasting and almsgiving; he hears the voice of the ministers of God, who remind him of these duties, and of the unfortunate who suffer and have need of his aid; yet, despite the movements

of his heart and the exhortations of the Church, he thinks only of his vulgar gratification, and consumes in it his time and his fortune. Surely this sinful course must be owing to a total absence of reflection; for if he thought seriously on this subject he would at once change his conduct. I will confine my remarks to the principal evils connected whith this pernicious practice.

1st. Luxurious living is contrary to the spirit of the Gospel and the Church. The Gospel unceasingly preaches penance; it contains these astonishing words: "*Blessed are the poor; blessed are those who weep;*" "*Except you do penance, you must all perish;*" and the Church, charged by its Divine Author to expound to us the evangelic code, has established throughout the cycle of the Christian year a series of days of fasting and abstinence, that is to say, of penance the most opposed to a life of luxury. Now, even if no particular sin is committed, is there not great danger in leading a life contrary to that which the Church commands at certain seasons, and counsels at all times? Is it not a perilous boldness to act in opposition with her

spirit, aud thus to hazard a progressive coldness in Christian life, a growing sensuality of the heart, a relaxation of zeal, all of which gradually weaken us in grace and withdraw us from the way of salvation? Its direct and necessary effect is to give predominance in us to what is sensual, material, earthly; to the injury or destruction of supernatural life; and to incline us towards earth and separate us from heaven.

2d. To lead a luxurious life consumes precious time. I have already complained that Catholics do not manifest enough of that activity and energy which is often superabundant in the enemies of the Church; may not the luxury of the table be cited as the cause with many persons? True, the fashion of long repasts in which half of the day was passed at dinner begins to disappear everywhere; still, though this abuse is diminished, it is not entirely discontinued. If we look into country life in the provinces, we see how much time is devoted to dinners with neighbors, or family parties. Do not misunderstand me. I do not recommend an absurd Puritanism,

nor do I wish to convert all Catholics into anchorites and Carmelites. I acknowledge that dinner or evening parties are useful and necessary in maintaining domestic and social relations, but it seems to me that, instead of devoting two or three hours at the table, and as many immediately after it to coffee and cigars, which are the indispensable consequents of a good dinner, only one hour was allotted for it on grand occasions, much time could be gained for useful employments. The health, also, which is impaired at these dinners without end, would be spared such exposure, and more leisure would be secured, and energy also, to utilize this leisure. When we invite a Christian to unite in some useful work — to visit the sick, or to instruct the ignorant, those mental invalids who are so little thought of — the reply is, nine times out of ten: "Really, I have no time." If something were withdrawn from these truly unchristian habits, we should be astonished at the amount it is possible to accomplish during life.

3d. The pleasures of the table become ruinous to families. We often hear it said

in the world, in reference to those wno have wasted their fortune,— a vulgar expression, —"This man has eaten up his estate." Unhappily it is too often true to the letter. To procure the pleasure of tasting the rarest viands, or the most exquisite wines, how many men indulge themselves in expenses far beyond their fortune and out of all reason! Every one should provide healthy and abundant food, suitable to his rank — this is all right; but when, to gratify a gross appetite, fortunes are impaired, or inordinate sums are expended, it is an abuse, a sin; for money misemployed might always have been expended for good purposes. A Roman cardinal was once reproached for heaving dismissed a French cook, who prepared excellent dishes for his guests, "What could I do," he replied; "if I had retained him, I should have been unable to continue my picture gallery." How many people, now a-days, sacrifice their gallery of pictures, and even far more necessary things, to the luxury and enjoyment supplied by a good cook!

4th. Finally, luxurious living hardens the heart towards the poor. This result is

produced in two ways. First, luxurious fare is very expensive. God, to quote an eloquent religious, has made cheap all the necessaries of life, and frightfully dear those which serve for luxuries. And what is true of luxuries in general is especially so for those appertaining to the table, of which the prices are ruinous in our great cities. Now, when so much money has been spent on this score, there is little left for the suffering class who are hungry. Besides, the habit of self-indulgence in every thing, really hardens the heart. "How is it that there are so many poor?" many of these lovers of good cheer will exclaim, after a good dinner. "Why are they so ragged, so lean, so filthy?" "It is," they will add, with a sort of sincerity, "because they are lazy," "See how I, or my ancestors, have toiled, therefore, I enjoy the fruits of their industry or my own; I am well clothed, well lodged, well fed. If I, or my ancestors, had been idlers, I should be like those people. Let them work, and they will become rich." And after this fine tirade they turn away their eyes from the importunate wretches, so repulsive to the view, to think of another

feast, and to enjoy life. Is this to be a Chritian ?

Let us, then, my dear friend, beware of this fault. Whatever may be done around us, whatever may be the example of our neighbors, or relatives, let us remain lovers of frugality. Let us be hospitable, though this virtue diminishes every day from the effects of the luxury of the table; but let us offer hospitality with cordiality and simplicity. In this way we shall find means of doing good, which we had not suspected; we shall benefit others by our example, and if we cannot put an end to the luxury of the table, we shall, at least, have the consolation of not having been led away by it

LETTER VII.

Improper Use of Money.

In our last conversation, my dear friend, we discussed the love of luxurious fare, and as one of the evils resulting from it we noted that of the waste which it leads to. But, as this vice is not the only one that gives occasion for useless expenditure, to-day we will take up the subject of the improper use of money in general.

In the estimation of true Christians, money is not, for its own sake, desirable. The Gospel always proscribes the love of riches; and when we have the daily bread which God promises to those of His children who trust in Him, with food and raiment, we ought to be content, without aspiring, like pagans, to the indefinite possession of fortune. But religion, which prohibits the desire, and instructs us to guard against it, prescibes the proper use of wealth; she forbids the acquisition of it by unjust means, but at the same time she prohibits the disorder and prodigality that destroy it. She

teaches that our riches do not properly belong to us, but to God, their author and master. They are like the talents of the parable in the Gospel which are confided to us to cultivate in accordance with the will of our Lord, consequently they are in some sort consecrated to this noble and supernatural end, and not for the satisfaction of vain caprices and idle fancies.

I do not here allude, of course, to the disorders common to the non-Christian world, in which fortune is made subservient to a shameful voluptuousness, to ambition, or to an unbridled pride. All these, I hope, are vices unknown to those for whom this is written; but I refer to that unwise employment of money, which, by the natural force of circumstances and ideas, tends gradually to undermine Christian families, by destroying their simplicity and replacing it by luxurious habits.

Many among the best people see no harm in this. It has pleased God to give us wealth, they say, apparently that we may make use of it. Provided we expend it honestly, and abstain from all that is wrong, is it not better to dispose of it in lawful pleas-

ures, and live like the rest of the world, rather than hoard it up like misers? I grant that there is moderation to be observed in all things; that the Christian should exaggerate nothing; that he ought to avoid making himself ridiculous by an unnecessary singularity, and that in all things reasonable he must follow the customs of the world. Formerly there was one mode of living, now there is another; and provided he does not go to excess, he must keep pace with the age in his dress and furniture, in the usages of society, and its external proprieties. But if economy has a limit which separates it from avarice, expenditure also must have bounds to protect it from prodigality, and unhappily at this epoch the general tendency is in this latter direction, towards dissipation, even among good Christians; and this is truly a misfortune.

But, you may ask, how shall we ascertain the boundary between prodigality and a wise economy? That which is proper for one is too much, or not enough, for another. A sovereign should be surrounded with more splendor than a private individual, and the latter ought to make the expenses proportionate with his income,

To fix a rule *a priori* is impossible, I admit, but each individual has a rule that may enlighten him, more or less, in limiting his expenses, viz: his income. Every man knows how much he will probably receive during the year; but do men always consult their income in order to regulate their expenses accordingly? I fear not.

For example, you have a fortune amounting to ——. By this fortune you should in the first place measure your outlay, and not by that of your neighbor, who may have twice as much, or who perhaps is consuming his patrimony and that of his children. It is upon this basis, and not on that of a false idea of propriety, or a ridiculous point of honor, that you ought to fix the rate of your rent, the expenses of your furniture, your dress, your table, and the amount to be given in alms. Then, instead of placing yourself on such a footing that, at the close of the year you can with difficulty "make both ends meet," you should make your calculations before hand to provide against unforeseen demands with a proper reservation for accidents or a reverse of fortune. Thus you will avoid prodigality, and as you

are acquainted with the circle in which you move, you will have no cause for anxiety about legitimate and prudent expenses.

Still, at this point, we have but half achieved our object; we have limited the total amount to be expended, but the details are to be defined under their various heads. This is of the highest necessity; for the sum total is composed merely of the expenses of each day, and neglect in any of these would overturn all general calculations. Here then, my friend, we must call good sense and moral courage to our aid.

Some expenses are useful, and others necessary. In these we should be liberal. It is a means of restraining others, which are the result of fancy or caprice. What, then, are these useful expenses?

At their head, the father of the family should place all that leads to preserve the health of the family, and his own. What mistakes are made on this point among the poor! How many laboring men deny themselves, and still worse, refuse to their wives and children wholesome and abundant food, warm clothing in winter, or a healthy dwelling, and spend in wine or coffee or

drinks, ten times as much as would be sufficient to make them comfortable! And among the rich are there not frequently calculations equally erroneous? How often they refuse to take certain timely precautions, under the pretext that they would be costly or unnecessary, while they waste three or four times as much on useless trifles, thus combining luxury with want.

Again, the father should place among the expenses of obligation, all that is necessary for the good education of his children. I have seen rich fathers practise on this point, a foolish economy which has led to the most disastrous results. I have seen them refuse to provide masters indispensable to their children, under the pretext that they were too expensive, while they indulge themselves in every luxury. As a consequence, their children become good for nothing, fail to occupy their proper place in life, and from discouragement, either undertake some unworthy occupation, or through idleness, fall into ruinous excesses. Accustom your children to dispense with expensive attire, and the fashionable follies which are so costly. Habituate them to

privation, to simplicity in dress, to pleasures that cost nothing, and are oftentimes equally agreeable. Here, we are at full liberty to economize, but spare nothing to secure the professor who will instruct your son in grammar, so that, later, he will not be rejected at his examination for his ignorance in spelling. Spare nothing to obtain for him the advantage of a thorough, classical education — in word, for his improvement. A good education is the best patrimony that parents can leave to their children.

Among expenses of obligation I would also include those connected with good works. In our forefathers' times these were large, and formed an important item. If they lived in plain houses, with furniture that was transmitted without discredit from generation to generation, they have left to us their magnificent cathedrals, their beautiful monasteries which were at once the asylum of learning and religion, the refuge of the unfortunate, and the honor of our country. Fewer carpets were spread under their feet in their own houses, but there was more splendor for the glory of God in the churches, and there were more institutions

of charity for the service of the poor. With few and noble exceptions, these examples have no existence in our day. Good works, the poor, and especially the Church, take their places after all other, even the most insignificant wants are satisfied, and frequently, indeed, they find no place at all. There are many persons of great wealth who give little, or rather we may say with truth, nothing, in proportion to their fortune. Is there not reason to fear that God may visit with a curse that wealth which is used in so uncharitable a manner? They fancy a donation of a few dollars to a collection, is above their means yet have no hesitation in giving ten for a box at some public amusement, or a hundred or two for the ball dress of their wives or daughters. How much good they might accomplish and without subjecting themselves to the least inconvenience, by practicing a little economy for love of the poor! How much might not these persons withdraw from their luxury, for the relief of the unfortunate! There are some holy souls who never purchase a dress without deducting from its price, although it may be thus made somewhat less

elegant, another dress for a poor old woman; others economize in their fuel, so that a portion of it may warm the limbs of an indigent old man; others use more common articles of food, that poor children may have something for their supper. These inventions of charity are as numberless as they are ingenious. Ah, how much it is to be desired that all Christians would imitate them! Useless and foolish expenses would thus find their best counterpoise.

To the expenses of obligation I should, add in certain cases, that of improving property. It is the duty of a rich man, or of a proprietor in easy circumstances, to offer the good example of judicious progress in culture, or industrial pursuits. Catholics are frequently accused of negligence in these particulars, and of leaving affairs to take their own course. I shall not attempt to examine whether these charges are exaggerated, but will only say that it is well to give no occasion for them, and that men who have a position, and who, besides, are known as Christians, ought to manifest their interest in the prosperity of those around them by giving an impulse to re-

munerative labor. By these means they will gain for themselves, and for good objects a legitimate influence which their alms and private benefactions might not be sufficient to secure. Now, improvements demand expenditure, and the investment of capital, and the prudent head of a family will be careful to provide for them, even if they should restrain the expenses allotted to recreation. Unhappily, too many neglect this precaution. A rich proprietor will sometimes expend thousands in carriages and furniture, yet would think himself ruined if he appropriated half the sum to open a road which would double the value of his farms, or to clear unproductive lands, to replant a wood, or to fertilize wasted or poor fields. Evidently there is food for reflection on this point, for many persons. They expend much upon objects that make no return, and are parsimonious where a solid basis might be laid for their fortune, that would increase their power of doing good.

Such are some of the expenses of obligation, in which an unwise economy might be ruinous; but at their side how many ex-

penses might be diminished, or even suppressed! Let us add a few words on this subject.

In the first place, the table at which you are daily seated; is it simple and sufficiently supplied, or is it far too luxurious? This is the first and great chapter of economy for a multitude of people.

In the second place, is your furniture not too elegant? At this time there seems to be a rivalry about furniture between neighbor and neighbor, and of relation with relations. Even in rooms used for the most ordinary purposes, which from necessity ought to be very moderate in their furnishing, there are tapestries, gildings, and sculptures which absorb fabulous sums. In other houses fancy luxuries are added to the list. How many reductions are demanded here by simple human prudence, and with greater force by religion.

Thirdly, what is to be said of dress in your household? We all know how costly it is for women; all complain of it, yet it is daily increasing. But do we always know how expensive is that of men? Does any one take account of the super-

fluities which from day to day they allow to be augmented without scruple? How much might be spared, is well known to many of our acquaintances, who, at the same time, could preserve a dress perfectly suitable and proper.

I will not speak of ruinous games, because it is to be supposed that Christians could never have the weakness to impair their fortunes by such pratices; but how much is spent, how many worthless things are purchased, not that they are wanted, but because men see and are tempted to become possessed of them. I know many persons whose incomes are but moderate, yet who impair them, perceptibly, by this every day folly.

I might pursue this investigation, dear friend, but my letter is already long; I would therefore close it with a simple reflection.

When I undertook this review of the duties of the head of a family, there was no intention of treating upon questions of finance, though these must take their place among them.

One thought above all has engaged my

attention, which is, that Catholics who often complain of the want of resources to accomplish their charities, or to aid the propagation of their religion, could find abundance in themselves, and without being made poorer, if they had only more simple habits. If women as well as men would yield less to the love of ease and self-indulgence, which are so opposed to the spirit of the Gospel, if, in order to do good, they would lay aside whatever is useless; if they would consecrate to the building of churches and Christian schools, or to the diffusion of good books, to retreats, to foreign missions, a little of that gold which they give so voluntarily to these purposes, and so willingly for their pleasures, they would do good to an extent of which they have no conception. To cite but a single example, how was it, three centuries ago, that Catholic missions converted so many millions of souls to Jesus Christ in the Indies, in China, Japan, and America? Doubtless the chief cause lay in the merit of the saints who devoted themselves to the apostleship like St. Francis Xavier, or St. Teresa, who gave themselves up to

prayer and expiation. But to these we must unite the holy prodigality of Catholic nations, who hesitated at no expense required for the propagation or defense of the faith. O God! reanimate among us the simple lives of our ancestors! Give us their spirit of sacrifice, and then we may hope to merit a renewal of the same prodigies in this old Europe, where so many souls await the moment of their conversion, and in the rest of the world where so many millions of Mussulmans, Pagans, Idolaters, and Heretics tarry in expectation of the good tidings which will one day be preached to them.

LETTER VIII.

The Love of Riches.

Extravagance in spending money was the subject of my last letter, my dear friend, and this leads me to one of its consequences which is not less deleterious, viz: — the inordinate love of riches. Nothing, in fact, excites the love of money so much as luxurious habits, because nothing creates so great a necessity for it. When our tastes are moderate, and we are content with little, it is seldom that we have any ardent or insatiable desire for the possession of wealth; on the contrary, when a man knows not how to provide for his expensive habits, or when he is placed in a position so elevated, that he is in constant dread of a failure to maintain it, then he is in a manner forced to be covetous of wealth without being avaricious; he is like the starving man who longs for food, for drink, to alleviate his hunger and thirst.

Disinterestedness is one of the fruits of frugal habits, as the love of money is a consequence of luxury. Let us develop this thought, for there is reason to fear that in our day, many Christians are led astray by this propensity which begins as an imperfection, and often ends in becoming a real sin. The Gospel teaches us to avoid all overweening anxiety about the things of the world; that "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," and it repeats this instruction in many different texts. Now, do the most faithful Christians always act upon these truths to the letter, esteeming them as of precept, or are they not too often overcome by the love of money? This is a question which each individual should ask of himself, for never were the seductions offered by fortune greater than at this epoch, when material interests seem to govern all minds and absorb every thought, and it needs courageous souls to resist this impetuous torrent.

Unfortunately, if we wish to be frank with ourselves, my dear friend, we shall discover in us too great an inclination towards this love of riches, which the Gospel con-

demns, but which the world so powerfully excites by the force of its example.

Few are they whose souls are so free from this imperfection as never to turn their desires to the acquisition of fortune. Doubtless a father should be careful of his patrimony; he should even seek with prudent foresight, to provide for the future, but this should be done without over anxiety, or passion. Is it always so among us? Let each examine his conscience, I do not venture on this ground.

Again, order, economy, simplicity, are the true basis of fortune; but the love of money induces the preference of other means more advantageous for the accumulation of wealth. I would not be too severe a moralist, but I must regard as a living, bleeding wound, the imprudence of men, honest but inexperienced in business, who with equal ardor and ignorance, plunge into speculations of which they know positively nothing, in the foolish hope of augmenting their revenues, of enlarging their expenses and *even of multiplying their good works*, as I have many times seen; and who, by these means, risk

the loss of their fortune and that of their children, and even their honor. If you are in good circumstances and all your life have been unconnected with business, do not, I conjure you, enter into it lightly; there are a thousand chances against you, for one in your favor. You would increase your fortune, only to leave more for your children: do it then wisely, not with avidity; by economy, not by speculations to which you have not the key, and which, you will in the end almost certainly have cause to regret. You purpose to do good works: then make a sacrifice in the retrenchment of superfluous tastes, and not in the operations of the board of brokers. This warning voice is dictated by experience.

As we survey the scenes around us, we cannot fail to preceive the unhappy consequences resulting from this neglect of the rules of prudence and the counsels of the Gospel, of which but too many Christians are guilty. Still, this phase of the evil is, perhaps, not the worst. The love of wealth engenders others more lamentable, such as hardness in the transaction of business, the spirit of chicanery, law-suits, quarrels among

families, friends and neighbors. Every day we hear of a coldness that has arisen between two brothers, or a mother and her son, or between two friends hitherto united in intimacy. Sometimes this coldness leads to disputes and, finally, to an entire rupture attended by scandal; all this because they have succeeded to an inheritance, and each would have the larger share for himself, and as all coveted the same thing, no agreement was practicable. The love of money blinds men, who are otherwise clear sighted, induces right minded persons to deviate from the line of probity which they had hitherto observed, gives rise to ill founded pretensions that never would have been thought of but for the vicious greed of gold. Exactions on one side awaken others as keen, until at last an honorable family, long known for its intimate union, becomes divided into opposing and rival parties. Affection is changed into enmity, which religion alone can by slow degrees uproot, yet perhaps, never entirely efface. Behold the consequences to which the love of money may lead, the fatal thirst for gold, *auri sacra fames*, as we used to say in college; and if

they are so lamentable in whatsoever class of society they occur, how much more are such scandals to be deplored among Christians, among men who are punctual in the religious services of their parish, who frequent confession and holy communion, and who for these reasons ought to be, more than others, conciliating, moderate in all things and friends of peace.

There are other evils of a character still more to be feared than these, into which the fatal love of money may plunge its victims, and which lead to the loss of all dignity of character. Every one is aware of the disorders and immoralities engendered in women by the excessive love of dress, the passion for finery, and the desire to create a sensation in society. It is an evil too well known to need further censures in this place; but, without going so far, we too often have occassion to remark the debasement of character that is sure to follow an inordinate love of wealth. When we have no fictitious wants, when we deprive ourselves of many things regarded by the world as necessaries, but which in fact are superfluities, it is far more easy to maintain

our dignity and independence. We can thus preserve ourselves without an effort from a multitude of petty deceits, and compromises with conscience, which weaken, if they do not altogether destroy, the sentiment of honor, On the contrary, if we encourage extravagant wants and desires, the necessity of money becomes imperious, and we are gradually prepared to sacrifice our integrity to their indulgence, our good name and our dignity to a material and momentary gratification. Why were the saints invincible, how were they enabled to triumph over themselves and the world? Because they neither loved gold, nor the enjoyments that it brings with it. Because, instead of fearing privations, they desired and practiced them; because, instead of shrinking from sufferings, they were ambitious of them as occasions of merit.

My dear friend, let us cultivate this spirit of detachment, of abnegation; and although we may not aspire to the heroism of the saints, we shall feel that our souls expand and become elevated above the earth and its vain phantoms. Gilded chains are the heaviest of all, and we shall bless God that He has loosed them from us.

LETTER IX.

Sensitiveness.

When treating upon littleness, we have already, my dear friend, mentioned sensitiveness, which is one of its forms; but as there is nothing more common than this excessive sensitiveness, nor more unsuspected by those, be it well understood, who foster it, we shall not, I think, lose our time in devoting a letter to this infirmity of our nature. You know as well as myself, many estimable, good and devoted persons in whom we deplore this disposition to take offense where none is intended. How these persons would be astonished if accused of being *over sensitive!* Now if this be the case with others, may it not also be yours who read this, or mine who address you? Why, then, shall we not probe to the bottom a defect unhappily so common?

In the first place, let us define clearly the nature of sensitiveness.

Because we are Christians, and pious, I will even add because we aspire after perfection, there is no reason why we should be insensible to everything, ignorant of what is legitimately due to us in deference and regard, nor incapable of resentment when these are withheld from us. Religion, while she commands us to forgive, does not require that we should be blind. She inculcates indulgence, but not insensibility. Therefore, when I attack this imperfection here in our tete-a-tete tribunal, it is neither a chimerical perfection, nor an indolent apathy which I would recommend; for I know and understand that the Christian, like all other men, should have the sentiment of honor and a proper sense of his own dignity. But the descent is slippery, and we are apt to follow it and fall into the sensitiveness which I rebuke, and which every one condemns in others. Is there anything more disagreeable, and at the same time more common, than those fretful characters who are constantly imagining that sufficient attention is not paid to them? In a social assemblage some one may utter a witticism, without a

thought of evil intent. Forthwith the sensitive man fancies himself to be the object of it, and if he does not go so far as to resent the supposed offence in public, he cherishes the remembrance of it and resolves to be avenged on the first occasion. Others may not have risen when he entered or left the room, or a visit may not have been paid precisely at the proper hour, or some one may have opposed his opinions with pertinency, all of which might have been, perhaps, better done otherwise; yet after all they are excusable. But he is shocked and considers any of them as little else than an insult to himself. Such characters are excessively tiresome, and when this defect is allied to sincere piety the defect is deplorable

Whence come, in truth, those little piques and petty bickerings that so frequently disturb the harmony of worthy families? In the preceding letter I have mentioned them in connection with the love of money, when they are sometimes serious; but when men are good Christians they endeavor, as a general rule, not to injure others in questions of material interests.

They avoid evil speaking and the calumnies which so often create division in society. They restrain those rivalries of wit or of coquetry which in the vain world cause so many animosities among women; and, thank God, these bitter wranglings are very rare in families where faith reigns. But as human nature exists every where, and is always weak, the spirit of disunion enters even into these families through the narrow and secret fissures of self love and sensitiveness. There may not be a positive wrong to complain of; but disputes arise from some trifle — some misunderstanding, or from a mere nothing, until efforts of virtue or of self-abnegation become necessary to forgive, or to induce the parties again to renew their association. Do you not remember that, some years since, a coldness lasted during several weeks between two friends of ours, because one of them had invited us to dinner on the same day that the other had a reception? You recollect the acrimony, the sharp words, to which this petty mistake led. We laughed at it, though it really grieved us. Alas! such is the history of human nature even in its best estate.

And in the midst of good works how sensitiveness enters to hinder their progress! To insure the prosperity of a useful undertaking, the union of several families is often necessary. But, perhaps, these families may be sensitive. Some wish to eclipse the others, and are as unwilling they should obtain any distinction or precedence, as they would be that they should outshine themselves in appearance or in the public opinion of their city. Their union becomes impossible. It is in vain that representations are made to them of the injurious effects of their disagreement, or of the good that would result from their reconciliation. An excessive sensitiveness has placed a wall as impassable as could be raised by antipathy; the good work often fails altogether, or languishes miserably for want of the harmony indispensable to its success.

This evil of sensitiveness is, therefore, serious, as may be seen by these examples, which it would be easy to multiply. Let us first seek a remedy for ourselves, and afterwards, if this succeed with us, for others also.

The first means which I would suggest,

is to discover this fault to which many generous spirits are often too blind. If, in fact, we really believed ourselves in fault on this point, we should correct ourselves. We continue in it because we are disingenuous, and excuse ourselves with idle pretexts.

But, you may reply, if it be so easy to blind our consciences, how are we to be undeceived? In my view, it must be by a serious examination of ourselves, and this examination is less difficult than it appears.

For example, I perceive that I have become less intimate than I was with some one member of my family. I have frequent disputes with him, and often there are harsh words on either side, which abridge or terminate our conversation. If I wish to correct my evident readiness to take offence in our intercourse, my first care should be to trace this disaffection to its source. Is it I who first gave cause for this declining intimacy? Have I given a bad construction to innocent expressions when there was no bad intention whatever? Besides, what has he really said or

done to me? Is there anything serious that merits so severe a judgment? I may be mistaken, but it seems to me that this simple examination would suffice to dissipate most of these pitiable broils. It has for them the effect which a ray of sunshine produces on a light fog, it dissolves it in an instant; placed in the light of truth, — that sun of our intellect, — they disperse of themselves instead of being massed in disasterous storms.

But, if to look it in the face proves insufficient to remove this mischievous influence, good sense and reason must be appealed to. We should call to mind that in life, sincere friendships are too rare to be lightly compromised, and that trifling differences ought not to be closely observed, as if with a microscope. Are they worth the friendship of half an hour? Or can they weigh in the balance against the sweet confidence that might reign in the family? And if they continue, and are renewed, they tarnish the delicacy of affection and mutual confidence. Let us, then, be reasonable, and cultivate largeness of spirit. Rarely then shall we be guilty of this

over sensitivenes. Should reason fail, we have still a better resource; we will have recourse to sentiments of Christianity, of humility in particular. Here, my very dear friend, is the great remedy. For, in fact, we cannot always have been without cause in our sensitiveness; others may have been unjust towards us, may have wounded us, though unintentionally. Reason offers few remedies for wounds of this character, but faith is not disarmed. Others have greatly failed in what was due to us; so much the better, responds humility — it is good to have something to pardon, something to suffer. We have been unfairly judged; again, so much the better, is the response of humility, for our greatest danger comes from pride; and it is well to have it mortified and trampled under foot. All this is but an expiation for our sins, a merit for heaven. Before such a resource how can sensitiveness exist at all? It can find no lodgment with those whose desire it is to be forgotten, who fear nothing so much as to be brought forward into distinction, and, who have far less fear of humiliation than of the seductions of self love. We will be

humble, my dear friend, and then we shall not be too sensitive. What joy for us if it were so? How much we should contribute to the happiness of our families, our friends, our dependents! What divine benedictions would be shed over our works! We should be blessed by our poor, we should everywhere persuade others to bless religion which alone is powerful enough to heal those wounds in our souls, and to transform into sources of merit, that which here below is one of the most frequent causes of the miseries of this life. "*Fiat fiat!*"

LETTER X.

Irritability of Temper.

Great and rare virtue is required, my dear friend, to preserve a constant equability of temper amid the varied incidents of life. Sometimes disease undermines it secretly, or irritates the nervous sensibility by incessant pain. Sometimes reverses of fortune or domestic cares pursue and harrass you. In these circumstances it is very difficult to preserve calmness, to be affable towards every one at home or abroad, or to be entertaining and amiable when all within you is over excited, and when every thing wearies, even to the demonstration of affection, or of interest, bestowed upon you.

The most solid virtue cannot always withstand these annoyances, and we see profoundly pious Christians give way under these trials to sallies of temper, to harshness and impatience which humiliate them afterwards, but are not the less remarked by those who criticise piety. It is not then without reason that we present these defects

in some of their principal phases. We will begin by sickness.

The pious author of the *Imitation of Jesus Christ* remarks, that few persons are made better by sickness, and unhappily experience fully confirms this sentence. It is, indeed, difficult to preserve a serious countenance and an amiable demeanor when one is tortured by gout or some other painful malady. The temper becomes gloomy, even morose, when it is subjected to these infirmities, for which science has no remedy, and which sooner or later must remove you from a family which has need of your presence and support. And even when life is not endangered, how trying it is to feel yourself separated from all enjoyments, from all social and domestic relations, by sufferings which, though not mortal, are not the less wearisome. Few, indeed, have sufficient self-control to resist this trial, and it is seldom that we are improved by sickness. Great spiritual good may, nevertheless, be drawn from it. Sickness is a mortification which is of great price before God, if it be supported with Christian sentiments, and if the will be submissive, while the body is torm-

ented. Self-imposed mortifications, fasting, and other austerities bear with them the consciousness that we suffer them voluntarily, and put an end to them when we will. Sickness, however, is a penance which we can neither abridge nor modify, consequently it is harder to bear; and if we support it with resignation and gentleness, abandoning ourselves to the will of God, it will be a most useful expiation for our sins, and an invaluable occassion for obtaining merit.

When we are ill, let us recall these truths, my friend, for though they are elementary, we are too prone to forget them; let us offer our sufferings to God, and if our pains are too acute to admit of any other prayer, let us at least say to our Lord "May thy will be done."

Let us offer to Him, besides, the discomforts, the ennui, the incapacity of accomplishing anything, which are often more distressing than extreme pain, and by a natural consequence, we shall make greater efforts to be good, amiable, or grateful to those around us. If we are ill, they are fatigued in serving us. The least we can do is to manifest our gratitude, and not to

be as those invalids, who are a burden to themselves and others, who will submit to no rule, have harsh words ever on their lips, and only aggravate their maladies by yielding to irritability. By pursuing the better course we edify others, and obtain merits for ourselves; for nothing wins more good will from the assistants, especially when they are irreligious or unbeliving. than the spectacle of patience, and even of gaiety and good humor, in the midst of sufferings. Though they have no faith, they feel, in spite of themselves, that there is something divine in that which inspires virtues so contrary to the inclinations of nature.

In other cases, it is not sickness that tries our patience, but the loss of fortune, a confusion in our affairs. True, it is hard from a human point of view, to see the patrimony of our ancestors, or the fruits of our labor threatened with complete or partial ruin. It is vain to deny it. It is one of the most cruel disappointments to a father to see the prospects of his children overthrown, and after a long life of industry to have its profits ravished from him, while he is obliged to begin anew. But even when

these misfortunes have overtaken him, is there any reason that he should make matters worse by giving way to rude or disagreeable manners? Can he find any real alleviation in maltreating his wife or children, instead of seeking consolation in their affectionate sympathy? Some impetuous spirits claim that they find in these transports a relief which is strange to the reasoning mind. "Let them discharge their bile" according to the vulgar proverb; but we must seek through the teachings of faith a more healthful balm for these wounds, The wealth which we term our own, is simply the gift of God, who can take it away from us, as he has given it. Myriads of mankind, who make no complaint, and find themselves contented, have, perhaps, a thousand times less than that which we still possess. These worldly goods are besides deceptive, and may be full of perils, if they attach the soul to earth — for they may make it tepid, and even dishonor it. Let us read again and again the chief passages of the Gospel, which exalt poverty and pronounce the bitterest maledictions against wordly riches. By a frequent repetition of

this exercise, we shall be enabled to bear with patience the chastisement which God has sent us — we shall even bless it, sooner or later, if we submit with a true spirit of resignation and faith.

Perhaps, at the same time, domestic afflictions may overwhelm us. Here, an ill assorted marriage, there a son is guilty of deplorable misconduct, or there may be cause for serious apprehension for the health of one who is most precious to us. Sometimes griefs even more harrowing than these befall us, which are made more difficult to endure when we are obliged to conceal them from every one. Under these torturing ills, how often the tendency of nature leads to impatience. At these times, how we are tempted to give a bad reception to the poor whom we know to be in misery; but then they are so importunate. The servants seem negligent; a child breaks an article of furniture, or soils his clothes. The wounded heart, in its bitterness, seeks subjects for its relief. All this is natural, but it is neither reasonable, nor Christian. It is not reasonable, because these explosions cure nobody, and render it only insupport-

able to others, and ourselves. It is not Christian, for God wills by these trials, to purify and sanctify us; to remind us that life here below is only the passage to a better, and instead of profiting by this instruction, we "kick against the goad" embitter our sorrows, and lose all the fruit.

When under the pressure of these afflictions, directed by Divine Providence, let us endeavor, my dear friend, to bear them with unfaltering resignation, and strive to edify others by our patience, in place of worrying them by our harshness. They are not the cause, nor, perhaps, even the confidants of our troubles. Wherefore should we make them suffer? Why add the remorse of this petty injustice to our personal griefs? And especially, why should we lose the occasion of gaining merits that are most precious before the throne of God? Let us do violence to ourselves, in repressing the ebullitions of nature, so as to obtain composure amid the agitations of life, and be masters of ourselves when sadness or ill temper tend to make us forget our duty and tempt us to anger.

I should close this subject, but that it

just occurs to my mind that these inequalities of temper are often produced not by real troubles, but by imaginary vexations, or merely by obstacles to our wishes. Observe what passes in most families, and you will find that most quarrels and disputes begin with slight differences of opinion. One would go out at a certain hour, the other choses to fix a different time. The father wishes his son to be dressed in a certain fashion, the mother maintains that another should be adopted, and for causes slight as these, or even more futile, they are vexed, and harp upon them unnecessarily, without scruple or remorse. As the fault is not of great gravity in itself, they pay little attention to it, notwithstanding the fictitious importance it attains from constant repetition, until serious consequences ensue, such as alienated affections, the scandal of perpetual bickering, or the unjust, harsh judgments which readily flow from those errors. Let us beware, my friend, and in order to correct them, let us examine if these faults be not in ourselves; for I have sufficient confidence in the good sense of a Chris-

tian, whether man or woman, to believe that so soon as discovered they will be rooted out. Here, then, is an occasion for the application of this celebrated, but too little practised precept, "Know thyself." *Nosce te ipsum.*

LETTER XI.

Curiosity.

To-day, my dear friend, it is my design to speak with you on the subject of idle curiosity, a failing so often attributed to women, so frequently shared by men. This, you may say, is a trifling defect. Is it indeed worth the trouble of being inscribed in the list of imperfections, which we labor in concert to oppose; and must we erect so severe a tribunal of censorship against this poor human nature, that we cannot even pass over the innocent gratification of curiosity? I admit, my friend, that as a general rule, curiosity ought not to be placed in the rank of our more serious imperfections but, was it not through curiosity that Eve, our common mother, began to lend an ear to the deceitful words of the devil? Was it not from a desire to know and understand every thing, that she fell and as a consequence, drew after her

the first man and their common posterity to the fearful abyss into which the entire race is plunged? There is food for reflection in this example, and therefore we may treat of curiosity without departing from our plan.

Curiosity leads to many evils, and among the foremost I would place the loss of time. To learn the news, and whatever is going on, whether it be important or otherwise consumes much time, and must be detrimental to the interests of our soul. Invite any curious person to go frequently to Mass, to form habits of regularity in spiritual reading, or self-examination, or in the education of her children, and she will reply that she has not time. But to make visits where she can hear the news of the town, either true or false, — to go to see anything new, to inform herself of the marriage of some, the sickness of others, the malicious stories that are current, — this same person will give hours every day if necessary, and if this be impracticable, she will suffer from ennui, that will be difficult to remove.

To this serious loss of time, will be joined that of the dissipation of the mind.

We often complain of feeling a repugnance for devout meditations, of dryness in prayer and distractions that so distress us. Of these, idle curiosity is one of the principal causes. If we were less ready to open our eyes and ears to all the impressions that come from without, less interested in hearing the gossip of our neighborhood, or spent less time in frequenting places of amusement, or in collecting news, the eyes and ears of our souls would be more readily bent upon serious thoughts and Christian sentiments. If instead of dwelling so much upon the frivolous things of earth, we would turn our thoughts more willingly towards heaven and its grand realities, we should be less tormented by that dissipation which brings so much despondency to our souls when we endeavor to recollect ourselves seriously before God. Nor do the mischievous consequences of curiosity rest here. It leads by a sort of necessity to evil speaking, to rash judgments, to all sorts of malignity, and even sometimes to calumny. Those addicted to this imperfection wish to know everything only to repeat all, to hear of

everything only to have the pleasure of being the first to announce it. And in this desire to be a person well informed, they gather, as if it were gospel, all that is bruited about, taking no account of the injury done to the reputation of relatives or friends if they can but tell something new; and by a ruinous but very easy descent, they at length come to cherish a secret desire to hear of scandals, or shameful but, in the eyes of the world, amusing faults, that they may enjoy the pleasure of spreading them abroad. Now if malignity of speech, if evil speaking and calumny are of so baleful a nature, and so easily degenerate into mortal sins, we may estimate the danger of the curiosity that fosters these dangerous germs. If we would advance in the ways of perfection, we must check at once this evil inclination.

Let us pursue, my dear friend, this scrutiny into the results of curiosity. From malignity and detraction, to feuds between families and friends, there is but a single step. In regard to calumny, it is evident; in evil speaking it is not less real. If we had not desired to know what in no way

concerned ourselves, we should not have been tempted to repeat what we have heard, to every comer, and by yielding to the temptation, we should not have alienated a parent or a friend, perhaps a sister or brother, who have been made to appear ridiculous, if they have not been exposed in greater faults. Consequently, these victims of our curiosity would not have been turned against us, nor would they have been betrayed in a public manner, which may be irreparable.

Alas, how many families might have lived together in union, how many friendships might have endured until the end, if indiscreet curiosity had not thrust itself between these ties of nature and of the heart! What a chapter might be written on this subject by a moralist!

Time fails me, or I should certainly indicate many others of the evils arising from curiosity; but I write hastily as my thoughts suggest themselves, counting on your indulgence to supply any deficiencies, and prefer to devote the time and space that remain, to study the remedies of this miserable defect.

The first that occurs to me is, as in all our infirmities, great or small, to consider its mischievous effect. For the most part we do not correct this fault because we do not consider its consequences, nor do we regard curiosity as really wrong. It is only an amusement some may say, and in a certain sense this is true, provided it be restrained within certain limits; but how can a fault be corrected when we are unconscious of it, when we love and enjoy it? Evidently it is impossible. To be conscious of the vicious tendencies of curiosity, is, therefore, the first step to be taken, because this must be the point at which our efforts to correct it should commence.

The second means is to lead a more serious and pious life. Why does the mind crave for trifles? Only because it is not preoccupied by vigorous ideas, or thoughts worthy of a man or woman of sense. Why do we attach so much importance to the actions or movements of others, why seek to penetrate the intimacy of their private life? Because we think too little of our own affairs, and of that which is the most important of all, the reformation of our own

lives. If we had it at heart to amend, and perfect ourselves in the Christian life, if we cherished in a higher degree noble thoughts of faith, and gave due attention, to the great interests of the Church, idle curiosity would quickly disappear. Speak of some worthless thing to a man fully occupied, and he will not listen to you, but pass on. The idle man only will lend an ear. Now for the Christian, is there not an unceasing occupation of the most elevated rank, in that of laboring for his eternal salvation? Is there not an interest that is above all others, as heaven is above earth? It is the interest of evangelic truth, it is the reign of Jesus Christ always attacked here below, never vanquished; it is the life of the Church, always militant until the day when she will be triumphant. *Sursum corda*, and curiosity will be dissipated of itself like a vapor.

Finally, if we would purge ourselves entirely from this imperfection, we must exert ourselves to combat it by a contrary inclination. Curiosity induces us to inquire, to inform ourselves. Let us attend to the Christian mortification which coun-

sels us to close our ears to all the vain rumors of the world. Curiosity urges us to questions injurious to our neighbor. Let us do violence to ourselves, and forbear to repeat what we know to his disadvantage, even when the publicity of the fact might give you an excuse for evil speaking.

Curiosity tempts us to participate without necessity in public amusements and pastimes which attract the multitude. If we can avoid them without injury to any one, let us offer this little sacrifice to our dear Lord.

By these simple practices, repeated with constancy, I doubt not that our curiosity will be gradually weakened, because a bad habit will have been replaced by a good one.

I pause, my dear friend and leave those thoughts with you. Perhaps, at first, you will think I have given them too much weight, but the Holy Book says that death enters the windows, that is to say, by the senses, and through curiosity. Is not this a proof that we should not treat lightly a fault that leads to such dangerous consequences ?

LETTER XII.

Inordinate Love of Talking.

When treating of the mischievous consequences of curiosity, we remarked that this defect led to another, viz., indiscretion in speech, which I here term the inordinate love of talking. We merely alluded to the evils resulting from this fault, but it would seem proper, for the completeness of our object to give it a more attentive study.

A widely spread pleasantry attributes this defect chiefly to women, and the run of satirical wit upon this point is inexhaustible; but of this inordinate talkativness, as of curiosity, we may claim that many men are equally culpable, and consequently both sexes should guard against this imperfection. Doubtless, my dear friend, in the ordinary conditions of society, we are not to be reduced to the austere silence of the Trappists; and the Catholic religion, so large in heart, does not impose on the generality of men a

severity of life or a stern constraint like those which certain sects of Protestants have affected. Far from this, the Catholic ought to be affable, unconstrained. When he is engaged in conversation with his family, or the world, he should take his part with simplicity and ease, carefully avoiding all that savors of ultra rigorism; for nothing would render devotion more odious to persons who judge only from the conduct of those who practice it. But between these effusions of frankness and cordiality and an exaggerated love of speaking, there is all the difference that exists between a reasonable use, and an evident abuse. It is good, useful and necessary, to bear a part in the conversation of the circle in which we are placed; it is wrong and even dangerous to give in to excess in speaking. In the first place, when we grant the tongue an unlimited freedom, it is very difficult, not to say impossible, that it should not be at the expense of charity. How is it possible to speak much, or to talk incessantly, without finding a temptation, almost a necessity to criticize this person, or to

censure another, to attribute evil intentions to a third, or to place in a ridiculous aspect lesser faults, even if the greater are spared.

When recondite subjects of science or politics are not in question, what is there left to talk about, by one who wishes to talk a great deal, if it be not at his neighbor's expense? He will often, in fact, give this as his excuse, because, he will avow, he should not otherwise have a subject. To speak seriously, is not this a warning to the Christian, of the evil tendency of this inclination? If an inordinate love of conversation leads almost necessarily to ill-natured remarks, is it not a proof that we should guard our tongue from falling into this excess? Even if the observations be not immediately severe, they must always be painful to the subjects of them, and a sin against charity is also involved. Besides, one offensive word leads to another, one piquant detail calls up analogous replies from this person or that; thus, after having commenced by raillery, they may end by impairing reputations, and the diminution in their

own souls, as well as in others, of the delicate and precious virtue of charity.

To the first danger is joined a second, which often recurs to my pen, and which I never fail to notice, because of its importance: I mean the danger of discord in families. Doubtless you remember, my dear friend, the intimacy which once existed between Francis * * * * and Henry * * * * * suddenly this mutual affection ceased, and gave place to an entire indifference. It was long before I discovered the cause. Henry, with many excellent qualities, had the defect of speaking of every thing right or wrong, and in a parlor when several others where present, set about turning Francis into ridicule. The subject of his ridicule was trivial enough, but his manner made it unpleasant. Some *charitable* person, such as may every where be found, took care to relate all to Francis, and as might be expected, with gloss and commentary. As a consequence, a warm altercation with Henry followed, with hard words on both sides, and an alienation, greatly to be regretted. Nothing of this could have happened, had Henry been more prudent in his speech,

and especially if one of those perfidious *friends* had not envenomed a discussion which had so trivial an origin. This history is the counterpart of what has often destroyed the union of many families and friends. It is the tongue, the inordinate desire to speak from a wish, as it is termed, of giving animation to conversation, which creates so much discussion, discord, and inveterate enmities. Why has our Lord declared that an account should be required for every idle word? A little reflection upon what has been written will readily account for the necessity of this warning.

A third defect arising from an inordinate desire of speaking, is indiscretion. We are both acquainted with Madame N. She is good and pious, and sincerely obliging; she loves to serve her friends and to aid the poor, yet with all these excellent qualities, she is without friends. The reason is that she cannot be trusted, A secret is confided to her, she promises the most absolute silence, yet she will scarcely have departed, when she makes haste to impart this confidence, under the seal of secrecy, of course, to all the gossips of the neighborhood. If

in our presence anything is mentioned which might give occasion for remark, and which the least discretion would quickly cover with a prudent silence, it is impossible for her to retain it, and in spite of her conscience, she so contrives that it shall be known to all, especially to those who ought to be in ignorance of it. What a detestable habit, my dear friend, in a Christian and a pious woman! She might possess, as compensation, a thousand good qualities, but they could not redeem this fault, for it is inexcusable.

What means shall we employ to be delivered from such an atrocious imperfection? It is difficult, I admit, but to a generous Christian, nothing is impossible. As with all our faults, we must first be conscious of its existence in ourselves. When in conversation with others, we should, after leaving them, recall what has been said, to discover whether we have said too much, or endeavored to attract too large a share to ourselves, or interrupted others, or deprived them of what was their due. In some faults it is easy to deceive ourselves, but for this it cannot be so; to know it, sincerity alone is necessary.

We will then begin by bringing ourselves to a just judgment, on this point, and thus we shall have gained much, for an imperfection confessed, is already half corrected. But we must go farther, and as soon as we have discovered our culpability, we must use strenuous efforts of self-control, and make it a rule to speak less when in company; never to interrupt others, which in fact, simple good breeding teaches; but willingly leave them the pleasure of conversation. We must also repress the ardor and impetuosity of language which we are so apt to mistake for wit, and which, perhaps, is quite the reverse. These small victories will tend greatly towards our advancement in spiritual life, if we constantly renew them. In life, how much is done merely from habit! Let us endeavor to replace bad habits by good ones. Yet, despite all our efforts, we shall forget ourselves; for, says the Apostle, "He who sins not by the tongue is perfect." Let us then, with sincere repentance, renew our good resolutions; and in the evening, in the presence of Almighty God, examine the occupations of the day that is closing, which has

been so short for good, but, too often, long for evil doing. Let us pause with lively sorrow over the slightest faults against charity, and the excesses of words to which we are addicted, that so often weary our neighbor. In treating this as a serious imperfection and exposing it to our conscience in all its odious realities, we shall soon learn to correct and modify it, and without falling into exaggeration or scruples which ought to be avoided, we shall retrench in our language whatever is hard or aggressive, and replace it by the mild and gentle conversation that becomes the true children of God.

LETTER XIII.

Petty Cowardice.

All of us, very dear friend, secretly or openly, lay claim to greatness of soul and generosity. Nothing wounds us, and justly too, so deeply, as when others seem to doubt the nobleness of our sentiments; yet, if we would be, not severe, but only just to ourselves, there would be very few amongst us who would fail to discover in the depths of their hearts a cowardice hitherto unsuspected, which would give them cause to blush. This examination is painful to our nature. We will nevertheless enter upon it, trusting in Divine guidance.

When we scrutinize our motives free from the coloring light of self-love, we cannot fail to discover in the first place the cowardice to which we are prone in the treatment of ourselves. We have passions, vices, faults. We are inclined to oppose them to a degree which satisfies our reason, and is pleasing to our vanity; but we will not go farther, because we would thus reach the root

of the evil, and expose our pusillanimity, something painful from which we shrink.

Time would fail me to review with you all our personal infirmities in detail. And what cowards we are when it is a duty to combat, not the anger of which we are ashamed, but the rancour which we cherish as a point of honor; not sordid avarice, but our love of riches! I will confine myself here to a single example, because it will place our weakness towards ourselves in a more salient point of view, and warn us to be guarded on other points that I shall not mention.

There is a vice to which, through original sin, our soul is more or less subject, at which, so far as we are honest, we blush; but to which all who are not christians, with rare exceptions pay a shameful tribute — even christians being preserved only by restraints and vigilance. This vice is impurity.

Yet among those who escape its excesses and combat victoriously, how much of cowardice remains! How the poor human heart, so wounded by the demon of impurity, still seeks a compromise with him! It would

preserve its purity, but if, without failing in what is due to itself, certain liberties may be allowed, how easily it gives way; how indulgent it is towards this effeminacy, which may not be sin, but is at least its prelude? We will not sin in act, but is our conversation always that of a christian man, or of a christian woman? Does it not lead to a freedom of speech that is considered innocent, but is merely a tacit compensation for the constraints imposed on conduct? Instead of frankly detesting this vice as a most subtle and dangerous poison, is there no secret affection for it, no interior regret that the law of God is so austere, His commandments so positive, and future punishment such a reality!

Is this manner of self-examination generous or true to yourself, or to the law of God? Or rather, is it not weak and cowardly, and does it not prove that you are already half conquered? The answer is not doubtful, and yet how much of this there is among good christians. Let us pray, very dear friend, that we may be delivered from such pitiful weakness, and have courage boldly to break with sin, and

aiming only at what is good, that we may join to this the greater merit of a pure, sincere and ardent love of virtue, and thus remain faithful to it.

It is not, however, with ourselves only, that we practice this petty cowardice, still more, if it be possible, is it our habit with others.

There is to be noticed, in the first place, our cowardice towards our inferiors. Of that which relates to children I shall not treat, at this time, because this point is so important that it demands a chapter for itself. I merely refer to it, and direct our attention to those who are dependent upon us: servants, laborers, employees, etc., because, as it seems to me, we give this subject too little thought.

Often we hear of the deplorable influence exercised, to the injury of faith, by men in authority, who unhappily are not christians. Do you not frequently hear of workmen who would faithfully observe the Lord's day if their employers did not oblige them to continue at work; and of certain employees who dared not take their places at the counter or the desk, confessing

themselves christians, because their superiors or employers would ridicule or even persecute them on account of their religious practices? And, on the other hand, we hear master workmen who are christians, declare that their laborers oblige them to violate their own consciences by forcing them to work in spite of themselves. We also hear of masters who complain that in their places of business, and in spite of their authority, still more deplorable scandals are introduced. Here, then, are complaints on both sides. Must there not be errors in each of them? Not at all. But to show that contradictory effects have the same cause, we must make the humiliating confession that christian superiors are too often ashamed to practice the doctrines of their faith in presence of their inferiors, while the unchristian superiors act without restraint. It is because the former too often shrink from showing a good example, while the latter have no scruples in giving a bad one. Certainly I am utterly opposed to forcing the consciences of others; hypocrisy is detestable, and its wretched effects are too much to be dreaded to allow us to

desire conversions from motives of fear or self interest. Yet, while respecting the liberty of others, every christian in authority has the right, and moreover it is his duty, to prevent evil practices in his place or with his property, or his capital or in his business. It is his right and his duty that none should do violence to his own freedom of action, and especially to set a good example in his own conduct. It is here that we so often find a pusillanimity unworthy of christians; they hesitate, they are afraid, they are cowardly in the presence of impiety; and every one having others under his control should examine himself severely to discover whether he is not guilty in this thing.

Along with this cowardice before inferiors, does there not exist much, also, in our intercourse with our equals and friends? We may have, for an example, an intimate acquaintance, or a relative who is without faith, or who lives as if he had none. On all other subjects, we converse freely with him, but on this we are silent, we must be prudent, we must not shock his feelings, we

must wait. Agreed: but to be prudent is neither to be recreant nor to speak unadvisedly, or never to speak at all. Not to shock him, is not synonymous with being mute on the most portentous question for a Christian—that of his salvation. It is to speak with gentleness and with that tender interest which makes us love counsels even when we repel them. To wait, is not to delay until the death of the sinner whom we would convert. Within my own experience I have known Christian sisters and wives who all their lives have mourned over the irreligion of their brothers or husbands, without ever having opened their lips on these all-important subjects. Doubtless these virtuous persons believe they are right; but beneath this prudence, I tremble lest there may exist the cowardice that we war against. For my part, I greatly prefer that energy of the women of the primitive times who knew how to speak of God to their brothers and husbands, of His justice, His judgements, and who were not wont to rely on silent prayers, often too easy to make, to be really meritorious or worthy of being answered.

In fine, my dear friend, cowardly with ourselves, and others, we are still more so with the world in respect to public opinion, and its praises or censures. I do not allude to that human respect which is a synonym for apostacy. This sin is of too deep a dye to be treated here. But to that pusillanimous complaisance of which we are so often guilty. Opinion, which is called the sovereign of the world, changes like the winds. Are there not many Christians who habitually court it, blaming to-day what they praised yesterday, and praising what they had before blamed? Do we not find them when with those who are indifferent to the faith, or who rail against it, protecting themselves not by a positive abandonment of the defense, but by treating with ridicule this or that point, and yielding to their interlocutors this or that dogma, or religious observance? Sometimes they are guilty of even the most contemptible railleries, which are simply the effects of their cowardice, and which, as coming from one who is reputed a good Christian, cast discredit without reason upon good works or persons,

because they have the misfortune not to be fashionable.

Alas, my friend, parlor conversations are full of these compromises of conscience, of this petty cowardice which we do not acknowledge, from which I fear I am not exempt myself, but which diminishes the spirit of Christianity within us, and dries up the sap of Catholic life.

Let us then make generous resolutions on these various points, and let us learn from them that nothing is more beautiful than to be truly and courageously Christian, and we shall learn to conquer ourselves and our weaknesses, our pusillanimity in our intercourse with our neighbors, and our timidity in the defence of right. Finally, let us renounce that human respect in conversation which, though it does not lead us to deny God, hinders us from glorifying Him. Why have the Saints held such sway over the opinions of their country and their contemporaries? How have they wrought such changes among the populations who had the happiness to possess them? In the first place, they were strong. They were masters of themselves and their passions.

They served truth and did not flatter vice. They conquered the world, and were not its involuntary servants. They loved God generously, and were not content to love Him in secret, or as if with closed doors, but aspired to make Him loved by all, glorified by all. And as these men boldly affirmed their doctrine, instead of veiling it with unworthy subterfuges, the world might for a time maltreat or persecute them, but was at last forced to hear, to admire and to imitate them.

Let us, my dear friend, renew in our souls the heroic memories of the saints. At the hour of death this will afford us cause for rejoicing, widely different from that of having yielded to worldly prudence. Would to God that all good Christians were strong and fearless in opposing truth to error. If they were so, the progress of the faith would be immense, and incredulity, which has for its chief accomplice the cowardice of the good, would soon be deprived of its mighty power.

LETTER XIV.

Rigidness.

Our poor human nature is full of contrasts. The letter I propose to offer you today will furnish abundant proof of it.

Our last discourse turned upon the petty cowardice and weaknesses of all kinds, whose secret roots penetrate the recesses of our souls. This subject suggests another imperfection totally different in its kind, which seems to be an exaggeration of strength of character. I mean rigidness. It is often said that extremes meet, which, in this case, is perfectly true; for frequently we escape from cowardice only by means of inflexibility,and from the weakness that yields every thing, through a haughtiness that concedes nothing. Victory at one point conducts us to defeat at another, if we are not indefatigable in our watchfulness over the inclinations of our heart.

True devotion evidently leads to amiability, indulgence and good nature. For, when

we are often in the presence of God, and have frequent recourse to Him by prayer, meditation, or the frequentation of the sacraments, it is impossible not to draw from this infinite source of goodness and love, a gentleness, a sweetness above our nature. Yet nothing is more common than to hear devotees accused of harshness and excessive severity. Unhappily the accusation is not always without foundation. Whence comes this strange contradiction between our faith and our conduct? We must scrutinize the source of the evil to know and correct it.

Rigidness among christians may proceed from two causes. One of these, though good in itself, is perverted by our imperfection; the other is fundamentally bad. The good and honorable motive which leads to rigidness in certain souls, arises from the state of conflict in which they live. The christian life is in all respects a combat, and the christian, like all other men, is subject to the temptations of our fallen nature, and often, in order to try him, it is the will of God that he should be tempted more than others. Thus, pleasure knocks at the door,

which for him, as for all, is ever half open, through the senses; or the love of gold, envy, hatred, ambition, seek to penetrate and govern his soul. These may cause fearful struggles. In the second place, the christian has exterior conflicts. His faith is incessantly attacked, either by raillery or doubt, which saps every foundation of truth in our day, or by specious systems that lead astray weak minds, and would shake, if it were permitted, even the elect themselves. He loves the Church and its hierarchy, from the humble pastor of the parish to the supreme Pontiff who is the common father of the faithful; and every day he hears the most outrageous insults, the most infamous calumnies uttered against the Church and its hierarchy. These insults are as unendurable to him as if they were directed against his mother, or as if a hand were raised against her venerated head. This again is hard to bear. In the third place, the christian is anxious for the salvation of souls; he wishes to see sinners do penance, his constant prayer is that the eyes of heretics and of the enemies of the Church may be open to the light. Yet

every day he witnesses the progress and ravages of sin. He sees faith obscured by doubt, truth attacked by error, virtue slighted by vice, and the evil seems to him so great, so universal, that he trembles for himself, and prays to God lest he, also, be carried away by this torrent. He feels the necessity of husbanding all his energies to maintain himself firm and unshaken in faith, and in the practice of virtue. Here is a hard and most painful conflict.

Now, if all this be true, does it not contain in itself a temptation to rigidness? Humanly speaking, it leads to that excess of energy which, in aiming at its object, goes beyond it; which, in order to strike in the right place, exerts unnecessary strength. Evidently there may be here found a serious cause for this imperfection, which is sometimes a subject of reproach in devout persons. This explanation bears an excuse with it.

But there is also a blameworthy motive which is not difficult to discover, and this is pride. Our Lord gives us a striking example in the parable of the Pharisee and

the Publican. The Pharisee, who despises others, and especially the Publican, whom he regards as a sinner, is the type of the man proudly rigid. He compares himself with his neighbor, and despises him, while he reckons himself just, and worthy of all the gifts of God. Let us examine ourselves by the test of this Gospel, without partiality. When we undertake to criticize our brethren is it because we find within ourselves a secret propensity to oppose our virtue to their imperfection? When we blame them for their love of the world, or their want of zeal, is it not because we measure ourselves with them, and the contrast manifests to us our own piety and devotion to God? Pride is an inexhaustible source of rigidness. It would be superfluous to attempt to prove it. Better is it to study the means for correcting this imperfection. We will begin with that rigidness which finds its source in a cause right in itself, but abused by our weakness. In this case it is the perversion of a virtue which is struggling, and at the very outset is not entirely mistress of itself, but suspects its own weakness. The remedy, generally, is

to make earnest advances towards christian perfection. The more holy we become, or at least the more we advance in the ways of holiness, the greater will be the calmness of our souls, replacing harshness by a gentle and amiable gaiety. Observe St. Francis de Sales or St. Vincent de Paul, both equal to the most austere saints. In proportion as they were severe to themselves they were affable to others. It was said one day in the presence of St. Francis de Sales that a certain priest was a saint, but very sad. "He is then a sad saint," replied the holy man, in that cheerful manner which never left him. This remedy is, however, too general and too vague, and we must find another. We should remember in the first place that bitterness in zeal seldom attains its object. Doubtless we ought to attack sin rigorously, and make its odiousness detested; but it is a mistake to include the sinner in these attacks or detestation. Now, this is the fault of rigidity; it offends many more than it convicts; it calls forth the recriminations far more than acknowledgements of a fault. We can judge by our own feelings. When

have we been most touched by remarks made to us? Was it when they were addressed with harshness and dryness, or when they were offered in tones of affection? Evidently the correction was more efficacious in the second than in the first instance. Why, then, should it not be the same with others, as with ourselves?

In the second place, we must admit that rigidness is frequently an injustice. By giving way to it, we acquire the habit of viewing everything on the dark side; infirmities inseparable from our nature become grave faults; even right intentions are suspected, and bad constructions put upon them. Instead of seeing things as they are, the least movement of our neighbor is scrutinized to seek cause for offense. This is a serious infraction of the *nolite judicare* so positively enjoined in the Gospel, and religion is thus made odious to those who observe it through this defective medium.

Thirdly, it behooves us to meditate often upon the promise made to the meek; *beati mites quia possidebunt terram:* "Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land."

Nothing attracts like benignity of language and gentle manners; nothing so promptly extinguishes the flames of anger or appeases discord, as the readiness of gentle minds to yield all that can be yielded, without betraying the rights of justice and truth. The mother of a family, for example, who possesses this virtue, if it be united with sufficient force of character, is sure to triumph over all resistance to good, all objections against faith. Unhappily too little reliance is placed upon gentleness. We prefer to restrain by sturdiness or harshness, and we only alienate and deter.

As to the severity that is born of pride, and which, perhaps, is the most common, its most successful opponent is humility. If we are humble, that is to say true, confessing our faults, and not dissembling them through self-love, our rigidity will cure itself, for we are much more indulgent to the failings of others when we know our own. Besides, when we are just in our judgment of ourselves, and perceive that in spite of our faults, our friends and relatives bear with us, a sentiment of equity and just reciprocity teaches us to condone the weak-

ness of others, and to do it with grace and benevolence, as when we reach our hand to aid a friend who falls, and not as if we were lifting a crushing weight. Oh, if we saw ourselves as we are, how quickly affability would replace haughtiness, and what progress we would make in this loveable virtue!

Let us then, my friend, you and I, who are devoted to good works, let us avoid all harshness of disposition and cultivate, on the contrary, that gentleness which is not affected, but proceeds from the heart, and is the fruit of goodness. We will be affectionate to all, and especially to our inferiors and the members of our household. Too many persons give way, with their domestics, to a haughtiness which they deem to be dignity, but which is merely a deficiency of benevolence. They mistake pride for an expression of their authority, and if they are known to be pious, they injure fearfully by this defect the religion that they love. Let us avoid these mistakes, my dear friend, and we shall thus have made a new advance in christian life, at the same time that we have labored for the edification of our neighbor.

LETTER XV.

Inconsistency.

One of the fruitful causes of our imperfections, my dear friend, is inconsistency. It is rare, when at heart we are just and pure, that we adopt, especially in important matters, principles notoriously false; while, on the contrary, as if by instinct, we love sensible and reasonable maxims. Nothing is more common than to fix on a true principle as a rule of conduct, and, in practice, to follow a false one. The fault lies not in the perspicuity of the judgment, but in the perseverance of the will; not in our error, but in our inconsistency. We shall not, I think, lose our time to-day if we direct our attention to this imperfection, though we should consider only some of its most striking traits. To place them distinctly before us, will be in itself almost sufficient.

Every christian father and mother ardently desires the eternal salvation of his

children. To express the least doubt on this score would be to inflict on them no slight pain. Now many, filled with this desire, act, by a strange inconsistency, as if this salvation, so dear to them, were, in fact a matter of perfect indifference. They wish their children to be religious, to believe in God, in Jesus Christ and His Church, but they fear they may become too devout. Under the pretext of not fatiguing them with piety, they detach them from it, and engage them in pleasures which, though they may not at first be vicious, are certainly dangerous. Should their son desire to frequent the sacraments, to assist at Mass and the other offices of the Church with extraordinary devotion, they discourage it as an exaggeration of zeal. Deplorable inconsistency! They forget that at an age when the affections are ardent, the imagination heated, he is impelled to take some decided course, and if it be not towards God, it may be to the indulgence of guilty passions. They forget that we can never be too religious, nor love God too well, and that if an excess in this direction were possible, it is not that we have exaggerated

love of what is infinitely worthy of love, but that we mingle with it too much of human feeling where all should be for God. And in the training of young girls, what inconsistency! Ignorant of evil in all its reality, but vaguely suspecting its wickedness, they fear the spirit of the world, and to appear frequently in its assemblies. They hesitate to take a part in its pleasures, which time and habit may increase. See how their mothers oppose what they style convent scruples, and with the pretext of polishing their manners, how they inspire them with the love of dress, and a taste for elegance and fashionable dissipation

Alas, my dear friend, but too often they succeed in both cases in repressing this *excess*. They would not have their son *too* devout. He must not be too much given to works of charity or practices of piety. Their punishment is not slow to follow. This fiery courser, who was not permitted to engage too eagerly in a career of well-doing, revolts against the hand which restrained him, and escaping from its authority, dashes furiously into the paths of sin. Fear not for him holy vigils, the austeri-

ties that weary the body, while they purify and bring it under subjection. The wrinkles on his brow will be traceable not to mortification but to vice. He will not expend more than custom and reason demand for charitable uses. Have no anxiety on this head; but pleasures, gaming, and debauchery will make inroads upon his fortune and yours, and you may be happy if his honor remain intact. A father fears that his daughter is too pious, that her devotions are excessive. Alas, my friend, unless the natural disposition of this child is particularly excellent, what, from experience, I dread for her are rather the follies of luxury, extravagances in dress, perhaps worse. Ah, if I could place before you the picture of lives which we all know, which by similar checks given to their early piety, have passed from the highest principles to the most ruinous excess, it would make us shudder! But I pause, and pass on to a second inconsistency, which is becoming very common even among the best christians. I mean their aversion to religious vocations for those who are dear to them, and especially for their children.

That men without faith in the Catholic Church should oppose a religious vocation for a son or daughter, I can comprehend, though there are many reasons that might be urged to change their opinions. But that which surpasses my understanding is, that christian men and women who love the Catholic Church, who love its priests, and more than this, who love religious, male or female, can offer such opposition to the vocations of their children as we see every day. For if we have faith, it is impossible to deny that there is any thing more noble, more sacred here below than the ecclesiastical ministry. Nor is it possible to deny that the religious life, for those who are called to it, is an admirable means of sanctification. Now, instead of rejoicing at having saints in the family, instead of regarding this honor as the greatest blessing that God can bestow upon us, it is considered a misfortune. All is done, that can be done, and, I will add, much that ought not to be done, to turn aside from it young persons who feel a positive attraction formally recognized by enlightened directors. This is indeed an evil, and a strange delusion.

It is vain to deceive ourselves: there are souls who have an absolute need, for their eternal salvation, of the religious life. As was said of St. Jerome, they must have Rome or the desert. If these souls are not the souls of saints, if they do not lead the most advanced lives in this direction, they run a serious risk of being damned souls. Just as much as we have reason to fear factitious vocations, or vocations of caprice, or those which are imposed,—which, thank God, are scarcely known at this day,—just so much should we dread to hinder a vocation, or see the love of the world invading that which we would not consecrate to the exclusive love of God. All men of experience who have grown old in the sacred ministry, declare this fact with unanimous authority. What a fearful responsibility then to turn aside this living source of love which flows towards God, and which may, perhaps, lose itself in the lowest regions of earth! What remorse to have deprived the Church of a useful servant, if not of a saint, to form a sinner! Do christian families give this subject due reflection? I know they do not.

Let us go farther. We hear constantly of the want of more priests; that the leading families in society leave to the more humble class the honor of recruiting the clergy. This is to be lamented, for, if it be well that this people with their vigorous strength, their natural energy, their training and especially with their numbers, should contribute largely to furnish the pastors, and the religious who are so much wanted in the parishes and for works of charity; it is equally desirable that the higher classes who have so much to regenerate in themselves, so much luxury and self-indulgence to expiate, should have numerous representatives in this saintly array, who form christians by baptism and religious instruction, who educate them in schools, who nourish them in want and sickness. A good priest cannot emerge from a family without leaving visible and blessed traces of his passage. To some he brings the peace of conversion, to others that of sanctification. Here he conquers a prejudice, there he inspires a virtue; and he penetrates, under the title of relative or friend, where, as a minister of Jesus

Christ, he would meet with a repulse. How many families are rich, at ease, and at the same time christian, among whom there is not to be found, even in the most distant degree of kindred, a priest or religious! As a consequence, how many souls remain inaccessible to sacerdotal ministry, how much ignorance among well disposed persons, and what incredulity is the result of this ignorance! This is a general, a public misfortune, and the parents who hinder true vocations, who, not content with proving them with judgment, stifle and paralyze them by violence, these parents, I must say, incur a terrible responsibility before God.

Your christian heart comprehends, my dear friend, all the gravity of these consequences. I will not therefore dwell longer upon them, but will turn to the consideration of another inconsistency, more dangerous because it is more widely spread. I mean the reading of bad books, that are prejudicial to faith and morals.

How often in our christian associations, we hear a unanimous voice raised against the ravages caused by these mischievous

works. One individual will go so far as to lament the discovery of printing, another recommends a suppression of these books as severe as it is impossible, and yet during this time there are often on the table before them, works that should justly be stamped as worthless and detestable. This is seen any where and every day, and we are astonished, not to say scandalized, to hear of all that certain women, who pass for pious, do not scruple to read. Sometimes they are romances that excite the imagination, and enervate the mind and are only so much the more dangerous because their abominable principles are concealed under language that hides their immorality. Or they are works of a graver kind, where, under cover of historical researches, the Church is defamed; or, again, under the name of philosophy the foundations of faith are undermined. They must, they say, have recreation, they must keep up with the current literature, they cannot live as if in a cloister; and, in fine, it is necessary to become acquainted with evil in order to oppose it. All these excuses, my friend, are mere illusions. It is permitted

to recreate, but not to poison ourselves. We may keep up with the current literature, by occupying our minds with sound, but not pernicious literature, and as to the necessity of knowing what is bad in order to oppose it, this is a difficult task, which it is more prudent to leave to stronger hands than to those of a mere man of the world, and much less a woman's. By such reading we risk our faith, which in our day is so feebly supported, and so fiercely attacked, and also expose our morals, which are so delicate that the impression of a moment may ruin a whole lifetime. Yet, for want of reflection, there are numbers who do not scruple to indulge in such astonishing imprudence.

Still further; even if it be true that dangerous books leave no bad impression on the mind, is it not positively wrong to purchase them, to leave them about the house, to extend the knowledge of them? To purchase these books, is to assist their authors and to give support to vice, while christian authors suffer want, and are disdained even by those who ought to sustain them. Alas! it is frightful to calculate the sums paid by

christian families for frivolous, suspected, or dangerous books, There is often as much spent in this budget of levity and inconsistency, as would multiply to any extent good libraries, and encourage useful publications that often perish for lack of readers, while they struggle against the approaches of an evil, deplored, indeed, but more frequently aggravated than opposed.

We have then, my dear friend, to form an unalterable resolution on this point. If we are fond of reading, as all should be, let us read only what is good, what is excellent; then shall our minds gain strength and elevation, and consequently true satisfaction; and let us banish from our libraries, and our families the frivolous, trashy, and immoral books that tend to diminish our love of good, and our horror of evil. It is a question of conscience and duty.

LETTER XVI.

Secret Indolatry.

When, seated on the college benches, my dear friend, we read ancient history together, it seemed incomprehensible to us that men so wise, so great as those whose master pieces we studied, could for an instant practice idolatry, or worse yet, believe in it. It is to be supposed that Cicero had lost all belief in it, when he asked "how two augurs could look each other in the face without laughing?" But at his time, and especially at an earlier period, there were men of noble genius who lived in paganism, and accepted its doctrines, if not in all its parts, at least as a whole.

This seemed to us incomprehensible, and yet it is easily explained. Paganism, monstrous as it is, had, since the fall of our race, taken deep root in the human soul; and not only eighteen centuries of christianity have been insufficient to extirpate it from the hearts of hundreds of millions of men, but in the bosom of christianity it-

self, among sincere christians, there still remain latent, but real germs of it.

What, in fact, is idolatry in the fullest acceptation of the term? It is the preference of the creature to God; it is the creature adored in the place of God.

Now, if we examine ourselves faithfully, it is impossible not to acknowledge, that while we have a sincere respect and love for God, we have also instinctive preferences for the creature; and if in theory we do not adore the creature instead of God, we too often, in practice, exclude God from our souls, and allow the creature to reign there. It is no part of my intention to treat of the extremes to which this inclination may lead, for they would be no longer little imperfections, but the most monstrous of vices. It will suffice to indicate some of these petty idolatries, hidden, or unperceived, to which christian men are addicted more frequently than they imagine, and which for my own part, I should esteem myself happy to have escaped. The first idolatry of this nature which occurs to me is that of our body, and all that belongs to it.

What, in fact, my dear friend, is the

chief occupation of many women, who are excellent in many points of view, of christian women who are frequently even devoted in their attention to the duties of religion. It is the toilet, it is the love of dress, of adorning the body of which they are so proud. It is the ardent desire to embellish this secret idol of their heart. They have praiseworthy instincts, they love God and His Church, they love their families, and are careful to accomplish all the duties of their station; but one thing has the first place in their thoughts, it is to be elegant, to have the reputation of being women of fashion. Speak to them of really interesting subjects, of literature, poetry, travels, of the family interests, religion etc., none of these can entirely win their attention. But mention laces or furbelows, jewels or ornaments, and, from the liveliness of their conversation, and the animation of their looks, it will be seen at once that the right cord is struck, and that we have touched upon the grand work of their lives. With this in view, what pains do they not take to acquire the latest style! No fatigue is too great, nor even suffering. It is often said,

and the remark is just, that no hair shirts can be more uneasy than the corsets of many of these fashionables. To be beautiful, or at least to think themselves so, they will make sacrifices which they would regard with affright, if they were demanded for worthy purposes. But for this object of their idolatry no expense alarms them; they stop at nothing, and hence arise incalculable derangements of fortune, even utter ruin, which excites the astonishment of the public, afflicts families, and too often leads to dishonorable actions.

This fault unhappily, is not confined to women; many men are equally guilty of it, and make themselves thereby ridiculous. What, in fact, is more absurd than to sacrifice all to the care of the body, to ornament with such loving solicitude this vile portion of our nature, which, since the commission of original sin, we are condemned to hide for shame; which had dust for its origin, and awaits at its end, the hideous decay of the tomb! Is not this, in truth, the meanest, the most contemptible idolatry?

Let us go further. The Church has taught us from our earliest years, that we

are sinners, whose duty is to do penance in expiation of our faults, and as a tender mother, even in her severity, she has imposed privations and sufferings upon us by which our bodies may be mortified. This is the sentence of the Church, but the idolatry concealed in our hearts says: "Of what use are fasting and abstinence? These minutiæ can be of no consequence in the eye of God, who is so great. Why may we not enjoy the blessings He has bestowed upon us, provided we use them in moderation?" If among christians these suggestions of fallen nature are not followed to the letter, they are at least partially admitted. They may not without some valid reason violate the prescribed fasts and abstinences, but they mitigate them by every means compatible with the letter of the law, without concerning themselves about its spirit. They persuade themselves that the commandment of the Church is intended only for obedience, and not for mortification, as if it did not include both, and gradually degrade these weighty and venerable observances into real minutiæ which become ridiculous in the eyes of the indifferent, or irreligious.

Whence comes this? Is it from false doctrine? To a certain degree it may be so, but the real cause is to be found in an excessive love for our body. Penance causes it suffering, or at least privation. Therefore it is rejected or diminished as much as possible. Austerities and macerations weaken it: they are declared useless or out of date, unfit for the present age and, indulging in certain pleasantries upon the life of the cloister, or reflections upon the necessities of modern life, they sleep in peace, in an easy and supine life, in the absence of all privation, satisfying every reasonable desire, and fancy themselves christians, pious, advanced in the ways of perfection, because they do not fall into positive sins!

This idolatry of the body, my dear friend, is one of the plagues of modern times, and, when in reading history, we compare the strong generations which preceded us, with the effeminacy of the present day, we fear it is a symptom, as well as a cause of decay. They despised pain and fatigue, and made it their sport or their glory to brave them. Consequently, their characters

were more generous, and inclined them towards God with an ardor that astonishes our degenerate souls. We dread physical pain or suffering, use all the means in our power to avoid them, and pride ourselves on our enervated civilization. Thus, let duty or conscience demand of us a sacrifice, and we shrink from ordeals that our ancestors would have utterly disregarded.

I pass now to another species of idolatry, the unregulated love of our children.

To listen to some persons, who consider themselves exceedingly well informed, maternal or parental love is to be dated in some sort from the present age. Before modern science had discovered that children should be brought up by reason, and not by obedience, there was neither affection nor tenderness for these little ones. This is insinuated rather than pronounced; but it is believed by many, and truly it is strange that such a thought could have its birth in the light of christianity. Who was it who said, "Let the little children come to me," if not Jesus Christ? Who has loved them more than the Church, or than the generations so docile formed by her?

It is not surprising that infidels doubt it, but I am indignant when christians forget it.

No, my friend, christian generations since the Saviour imbued them with his tenderness in infancy, have always been faithful to this sentiment of love, which sprang from the heart of a God. In pagan antiquity, the law was cruel towards infancy: it has never been so among the nations formed by the Church. And if with the ancients, parental love was more benign than their laws, there never was an affection more sweet and generous than the care of the christian mother, and christian father, for the children with whom God has blessed their union. Let all antiquity be searched for mothers more tender than those whom the gospel has formed. I defy the world to find them. But if christian parents love their children to a heroic degree, if for them they are ready to submit to every privation, every danger, every torture, they love them without weakness, and with magnanimity. Assuredly Blanche of Castile, loved her son as seldom a mother has loved: but she would rather

have seen him dead than stained with a mortal sin. Yes, the mothers of the martyrs would have a thousand times perferred to ransom at the price of their own lives, those of their children who were sent to die for their faith; but at no price would they have consented to save those beings so dear to them, by even a seeming apostasy. Yet, without going so far as these sublime and rare examples, the mothers of families devotedly cultivated in their children above all purity of morals and integrity of faith. And if to correct their faults, to save their souls, it became necessary to use severity, they did it with an energy which we cannot now appreciate, because we have no longer the same force of character, and especially of conviction.

Now, my dear friend, what is the fault of our day? Parents fancy that they love their children more, because they flatter and spoil them; they think themselves devoted, because they yield to their caprices, instead of correcting them. To me it seems a real and dangerous idolatry. Parents are, in fact, so proud of their sons or daughters, so delighted with their every word and action, that they overlook their

faults, even of anger or violence, and find all not only excusable, but charming. This weakness is such, that for nothing on earth would they thwart, or give them pain in any way, by reproof or punishment. They even go so far as to insist that punishments the most judiciously applied, falsify the character of children, and make them hypocrites; as if the absence of all rule and authority must not necessarily develope in them an unbridled independence, the source of the most deplorable vices.

This great evil has often been rebuked by eloquent voices: but what is the cause of it? It lies simply, my dear friend, in the weakening of christian sentiments — in the secret idolatry of which I am speaking. There was a time when parents generally sought above all the eternal salvation of their children, and, when it was necessary to destroy dangerous habits, they did it, cost what it might, even if it made their hearts bleed, as a conscientious physician cures a mortal wound, if need be, by fire and iron. In our times there are parents, often decidedly christian, who aim first to secure the temporal welfare of their children. The beauty of their persons

affects them far more than that of their souls, and they are more solicitous to secure for them the transient joys of youth, than the eternal joys of heaven; as though the latter pertained to a future so distant that they can not give it a serious thought. Yes, children are badly brought up. They are spoiled, corrupted, because their parents are devoid of true faith, and are absorbed in the world, to the neglect of divine things. All pain, all fatigue are avoided, because they care for the well-being of the body only; and this idolatry for their children is merely a disguised continuation of that which they entertain for themselves.

With these reflections I leave you, my dear friend. I cannot now enter into further details: neither would a few lines suffice for a treatise on education. I merely suggest the principle, and this principle is so fruitful, that if it be once admitted the consequences will be abundant. St. Augustin said, "Love, and do what you will." I would say, love your children in a christian way, train them for God, for their duties and not for yourselves, and in your paternal hearts you will know what you ought to do for their education.

LETTER XVII.

Censoriousness—Insubordination.

The true spirit of independence, my dear friend, is a noble quality, which in all time has obtained eulogiums from right-minded and generous men. Not to speak unless to give utterance to our thoughts, to do it without shame or weakness, without imprudence or useless provocation, to dare to say the truth to those more powerful than ourselves, and especially to do our duty courageously under all circumstances, is a rare virtue, worthy of all praise and respect.

Many persons of a censorious and domineering temper imagine themselves possessed of this independence. Because they arrogate the right of judging and criticising everything, they consider themselves elevated above the common weakness of a culpable human respect, while they have nothing more than a narrow-minded bitterness of character which annoys others by its carpings, and themselves, by the animosity it excites.

This defect is so general that few christians can hope entirely to escape it. True, it has been justly said that the Catholic Church is a great teacher of reverence, but the evangelic law demands such perfection, that the best fail in some duty or other, and hence they are often not more guarded than others against this weakness of humanity.

We will then, my dear friend, consider this tendency to censoriousness among christians. Many excellent persons give way to this defect. If we can convince them of their illusion, we shall render them a great service. We shall confine ourselves to two examples; reflection will supply the rest. These examples are striking: I will trace its effects in the family, and in christian life.

I do not like those retrospective lives of our ancestors, which depict their epoch, as a heaven without clouds, and their families as an earthly paradise, — their characters a combination of virtues without admixture of vice. Such an ideal never had an existence on earth, nor can it have one in future time. Neither can I approve those pious exaggerations that often do

greater injury to truth than is suspected. If I believe and declare with the voice of history, that always and everywhere there has existed among men, and in society, the conflict between good and evil, there is another point which cannot be contested. It is, that even in the best christian families, the sentiment of reverence is weakened, or entirely wanting. Numerous causes might be assigned. I will mention only two: the weak indulgence of parents, who have neglected during infancy to subject their children to their legitimate authority, who have feared to command or punish them; and, the changes in our laws, which have disarmed paternal authority, by depriving the father of a family of the full disposal of his property. In youth the father does not *dare* to chastise his son when he disobeys him, and at a mature age he has no power to punish his faults by depriving him of the share of his estate of which he is unworthy.[1] The fear of being

[1] The French law of the epoch of '93 is here referred to, which obliges the father to leave an equal share of his property to each of his children. The *levelling principle*, unhappily so universal in the United States, together with the unrestrained use of private judgment, produces nearly the same results in this country.

disinherited might have made him more dutiful.

In former ages, the abuse of paternal authority and influence was the subject of apprehension. When the father or mother had spoken, nothing further was to be said. Not only the actions, but the will also was submissive. All admitted that if the heads of families had adopted certain views, they must be the best; just as in a well disciplined regiment, the soldiers are inclined to believe that the colonel is right when he commands a manœvre: or if they do not go so far as this, they dare not resist, except in extraordinary cases, but obey him, however reluctant they may be. Is this the practice in the christian families of our day? How many, on the contrary, there are, in which the young girls, who in the main are religious, and the boys, who give the least anxiety to their parents, make no scruple to prefer their own judgment, and laugh at the superannuated notions of their father, or the old-fashioned tastes of their mother? In how many households are not the children sole masters of their own destiny in the choice of a future profession, or

marriage. From their entrance into college or into the convent, they change this as often as their caprices suggest; as, at a later epoch, they will change their occupation or profession in life. How many, whose parents dare not expostulate in the most simple and natural terms, lest they should be repulsed, and who find themselves under the necessity of communicating their counsels through strangers, or the youthful friends of their children.

Evidently, so far as we can see, that which predominates in these families is the spirit of insubordination. Often, indeed, the children will not formally disobey their parents. They would not grieve them; but above all things they must assert themselves, and show that they are men, who have a will of their own, good or bad it matters little, if they are only independent. And to prove this they assume an air of raillery, of petty resistance in small things, of a tacit insubordination that may be converted at any moment into disputes, and perhaps into serious misunderstandings.

It is, then, of the highest importance to Catholics, who wish to lead a holy life, to

correct this prospensity, which is sinful in its causes and in its consequences. And if any have friends addicted to this fault, they should entreat them to reflect, and to examine themselves. This done, they cannot again regard it as insignificant. If we are so happy as to secure their attention, the cause will be nearly gained, for in such matters the most difficult part is not to do one's duty, but to know it.

In the daily life of christians, the spirit of censorious insubordination is not less mischievous, nor is it less common. For example : a lady is devout, she never omits any of the practices of piety in her parish, nor a sermon. She is present at all the assemblies for charity and goods works; but she never leaves them without criticism and censure. In the most minute details of the service she sees something to blame, and in the conduct or movements of the sacristan or beadle she finds inexhaustible subject of blame. As for the sermons she is never satisfied; this one is too short, that was too long, one is too learned, another too familiar in tone — all are tiresome and hardly worth listening to. She only hears

them for the sake of giving a good example. In assemblies for charitable purposes and works, instead of observing the good and noble side, the generous impulses, the pious zeal manifested, her soul, fervent nevertheless but discontented, has seen only the pretentions of this or that person, the absurdity of another, the ill humor of a third, whose counsels had not been adopted.

Again, a man may love the Church and her ministers, but he remarks only the discrepancy between the Church, which is the immaculate spouse of God, and the ministers of God, who are men, and not angels; and indifferent as to whom he may offend, he exposes to every one, without motive or reason, the real or supposed defects of his pastor, or some priest of the parish. He may report nothing seriously wrong, because there may be nothing of the kind to relate; but the most trivial actions are brought to light, and placed in relief, instead of covering with a mantle of charity the little weaknesses that are incident to humanity.

Another person dislikes a certain religious community. Why, he cannot say —

perhaps he has heard some idle report, perhaps he is attached to another community, and his heart is too small to love one, without disliking the other. But, beginning with this slight aversion for which he knows no cause, he falls, upon every occasion, with or without reason, upon this poor community. All that it does is wrong or out of place. The rules, which may have emanated from a saint, and must at all events have been approved by the Church, are decried and ridiculed. Even the costumes become a subject of raillery, or of malicious observation; and in this petty warfare, in which not one ounce of sense may have been expended, there has been consumed, without the least profit, a pound of good and solid charity.

It would not be difficult, my dear friend, to extend this picture, but I refrain, lest you should accuse me of the self same fault which I am condemning — censoriousness. It is better to ask where all this is to end. It is easily seen. The result of this censorious spirit is evident. By these criticisms upon the minor details of the religious services of the parish, which doubtless are not always

perfect, we do the work of the irreligious and unbelieving, who seize upon these family criticisms to exaggerate them in public, and we afford pretexts to the idle and tepid to excuse themselves from being present at the ceremonies of the Church. By repeating that the sermons are tiresome, we keep away many people who are accustomed from habit to hear them, and are none the worse for it, and we accustom those who are faithful in their attendance, to listen with a critical spirit which destroys all their fruit. It is incredible to what extent mere witticism, though innocently uttered, may destroy the influence of a preacher; yet who denies himself the indulgence of such pleasantries?

I add another example, When works of charity are spoken of, and the weakest side only is held up to notice, many become accustomed to view them in the same light. Some, who were sensible of their utility become disgusted, while others, who would probably have wished to take a part in them, are discouraged and lose an occasion for doing good. Has there not been in reality, a wrong committed, the consequen-

ces of which may be ruinous to many suffering poor, and to many souls who needed this edification.

Finally, by some slight sin of the tongue, a priest or a community has been ridiculed. Does the speaker know what he has done? He has perhaps paralyzed an excellent work that was in preparation. Some soul feels moved and attracted to the pursuit of good through the virtues of this priest, or the edifying life of that great community. This insinuation has in an instant effaced their impression, and, if we would be just with ourselves, if we would recall what our own experience has taught us, it must be admitted that I have neither exaggerated nor amplified anything.

A censorious disposition is then, my dear friend, greatly to be feared. With an insignificant appearance, it is a formidable evil, and it is not a matter for surprise that they who indulge it, are sensible of a diminution of their piety and love of God. We shall be unable, it is true, to correct the human race in this, as in the multitude of defects over which we have mourned together, but let us at least

endeavor to reform ourselves, and since we are christians, let us treat with exterior respect, that which we venerate in our hearts, nor destroy with a derisive smile that which we would possess at any cost. This will certainly be an advance in the career of perfection.

LETTER XVIII.

Rancor.

Many persons would be astonished, my dear friend, if you told them that they know not how to forgive. Because they have said, at a confession, or at a communion, that they forgive a certain injury, they imagine they have done it entirely, and sincerely. Nothing however, is more difficult, and consequently more rare than true forgiveness.

I do not here allude to the desire of vengeance which may be detected among certain persons calling themselves Christians. These are criminal passions, nor do I admit within the scope of our correspondence, I repeat, those great faults which give matter for a sermon, rather than a letter. Our attention here, is directed only to those originating in weakness or imperfection; therefore we will speak only of the lesser animosities, the secret, but bitter rancor which the best Christians some-

times find it difficult to cast away altogether. And to make it more practical, I will study with you the symptoms that betray the existence of this infirmity.

Rancor, in fact, is often very subtle, and conceals itself under specious pretences. "I have forgiven him," one will say, "but a proper self respect forbids me to speak to him again." "I will never injure him," adds another, "but prudence obliges me to remember his misconduct, and even to reveal it; I do not wish to expose him, but it is a dictate of conscience, for he is a dangerous person." The difficulty of rendering an accurate account of this state of our conscience is, that there is sometimes in these pretexts, an appearance of truth, which, though mingled with error, has a certain degree of reality. Let us strive to make a stricter analysis of these feelings.

One of the first symptoms by which I recognize within myself an animosity towards my neighbor, is bitterness. When, through a sense of self respect, which need not be denied nor exaggerated, I have broken with a person whose conduct has

merited this treatment, I can discover by a certain sign whether any rancor yet remains; it is, if I can speak of him without acerbity, and with the same calmness and indifference, as of one who had never injured me. If I can do this, I may rest content, but if, when his name is mentioned, I feel a certain emotion, if in speaking of him, I cannot avoid unusual severity of judgment, if I am pleased to hear him blamed, if I am sensible of a sort of a secret satisfaction, not when misfortunes overtake him, but discomfiture or contradiction, then bitterness assuredly still rankles in my heart. I thought I had really pardoned him, but I had not. I fancied I had done only what was demanded by self respect, but I have gone far beyond it. I must then be on my guard, and watch my conscience, and root out hidden vindictiveness.

A second test which can scarcely deceive me in this study of myself, is the reception I give to those who have injured me, when I meet them. If my rancor is entirely gone, this meeting will be simple, cordial, natural. If an intimacy

had been for a moment chilled, it will return, as of itself: a cloud had been interposed between us, it has passed away, and the sky resumes its serenity. But if, on the contrary, I am cold towards this old friend, if instead of cordially pressing his hand, I withdraw mine with dignity, if my features still bear traces of the clouds, that have passed over them, certainly my animosity has not disappeared. It was not the sentiment of self respect that guided me, but remembrance of the injury, and I should apply to myself in its reality the precept of forgiveness as formally enjoined. I dare no longer deceive myself.

A third type of rancor is the remembrance of the details and circumstances that accompanied the injury, or coldness. Thus, one of your friends has given you real cause of grief: he has been ungrateful, he has betrayed you. You sincerely forgive him, but you are unable to banish from your mind a vague impression of sadness and pain. Your forgiveness has been entire and true: but forgiveness is not oblivion. A year after the occurrence of the injury, two years, perhaps ten, your recollection of

it is as vivid as on the same day: all the circumstances are fixed in your memory, with every minute particular. Evidently, you have not forgiven it. Only rancor has so tenacious a memory. Those minutiæ have remained in your thoughts, only because a secret vindictiveness encouraged them to grow and even become exaggerated in your mind. Forgive, according to the vulgar expression, from the bottom of your heart, and speedily all these clouds will disappear, or if there remain but the slightest recollection of this wounded friendship, the remembrance will become constantly more vague, until it is finally dissipated.

From these indications, my friend, it seems easy to distinguish between rancor and the reserve which prudence and a due regard for our own dignity demand. We will now observe some of the evil consequences of this imperfection.

On this, as on every point which we have hitherto considered, we are very indulgent to ourselves; but we forget that the public are severe. When two persons of known piety have fallen into a disagreement which has acquired publicity,

if they are not sincerely reconciled, numbers of those, who are themselves indifferent to religion, become prodigiously scandalized. Nor can I find it in myself to blame them. They cannot imagine that men, and especially women, who frequently approach the sacraments, who often have upon their lips and hearts the blood of the God of mercy and pardon, who recite every day, often many times in the day, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," can be so punctilious, or admit so tenacious, so culpable an animosity.

The world pronounces such persons either inconsistent and unworthy of esteem, or that they do not really believe what they profess. What scandals are produced by this petty hatred! Would that those who give way to it could, if but for a moment, hear what is said of them by the unbelieving world! They would soon learn the greatness of an imperfection to which they yield without scruple.

Another injurious consequence of this rancor is the division it creates among christians. In the beginning of this correspon-

dence, we spoke of antipathies and littleness. Among the primary causes of these defects, rancor has its place. A person has contradicted and offended you, and you retain a dislike for him: if you are not careful, this will grow into antipathy, which will lead you into something unworthy of you. Whenever he speaks, you will consider it your duty to contradict him; if he act, you will think only of thwarting him; if he be successful, you will be unhappy; and if he fail, you will rejoice, as if it were a success. Thus, much of your time, and your intelligence will be wasted in these unprofitable personal quarrels. Having already discussed these subjects, I will not now renew them: but the more I think of it, and the subject has often recurred to me since our first letters, the more am I convinced that these divisions are the chief causes which hinder good works, which paralyze conversions, render the zeal of our preachers sterile, and often in souls otherwise holy, strike with barrenness all their efforts. Let us, then forgive and pardon always; thus we shall avoid many divisions, antipathies, and littlenesses.

Besides these grievous effects, rancor dries up true piety. We are pained sometimes to feel that the grace of God is less present with us; that when we would pray, we have only distractions; when we would approach the holy table, we bear thither a heart of ice. After the best resolutions, we are more feeble than ever, more inclined to anger, to vanity, to egotism, to the manifold defects which we have promised Almighty God a hundred times to correct. This state, too, afflicts and disquiets the mind, and terrified we dread some fearful fate, if indeed we are not lead to an abandonment of God. Now this dryness is not only a trial, it is a punishment. In the depths of our heart we have nourished a secret hatred, so contrary to the gentle spirit of the meek and the humble Jesus, who, for our chastisement, withdraws the abundance of His grace to leave us alone with our weakness. Happy, thrice happy, if we curb ourselves before it is too late, and comprehending the cause, seek diligently to destroy it. Then let us, in the presence of God, form good resolutions to remove every root of this fatal rancor from

our souls. A Christian who entirely forgives his brother, is very powerful with the Divine heart. If he wishes to obtain a conversion, I have the belief that he will gain it more easily by the pardon of injuries than by the greatest austerities, which, nevertheless, have great weight in the balance of divine justice. If he desires a great grace, I am confident that God will not refuse him, either in the spiritual or temporal order. How have St. Vincent de Paul or St. Francis de Sales restored to the faith so many wandering souls? Because they were mild — forgiving from the depths of their hearts the most cruel injuries. When they were insulted, instead of being indignant, they returned only a gentle smile. Their works and their pious foundations were decried, which was the hardest trial of all; yet, instead of vindicating them, they rejoiced that they were preserved from vain glory by these humiliations and contempt. Neither you nor I, my dear friend, can attain to this heroic spirit, but let us follow their footsteps in gentleness and in the forgiveness of injuries. Let us endeavor to extinguish in our hearts the

last vestige of rancor, from whatever cause it may proceed. Let there be no exceptions in our pardon. We will not pretend, when others have attacked that which we hold most dear, our reputation, our friends, our family, that we could have forgotten any other insult; for, with this language, we may soon reach the point of forgiving nothing, and cherishing hatred on all sides. If we cannot be merciful as our Heavenly Father is merciful, since we are sinful men, let us at least go as far as our weakness will allow, and this will be a means the more to make rapid advances in Christian life.

LETTER XIX.

Levity of Mind.

The Christian ought to be a grave man. Instructed by the teachings of the Church he ought to view the things of life from another point than that of frivolous men. Therefore you will not be surprised that I range among the imperfections to be combated, levity of mind. I do not confound gravity of demeanor with melancholy. On the contrary, it is certain that true piety is joyous and glad; and when I meet among religious persons, as it may sometimes happen, a morose character, I attribute this dark humor to his temperament, to a moral infirmity, and not in the least to his religion. Yet though sincere devotion is allied to the feelings and gaiety, it is incompatible with levity of mind, that mobility of disposition which never fixes itself upon any serious object, that inclination to judge of things superficially by appearance more than reality.

Levity of spirit leads to very false judgments in religious matters. To a Christian worthy of the name, who is given to reflection, the greatest of all evils is sin, for it is the separation more or less complete, but always real, of the soul from God. By it eternal salvation is compromised, if not entirely lost, which is the most dreadful of misfortunes. Alas, how few Christians consider these things in their true light, because they are given over to the levity of the spirit of the world. Let us adduce some examples. You surely remember that Christian mother who thought herself sincerely pious, and whose son has fallen so low. When this unhappy youth had plunged into the most shameful vices, she was in despair, and this great sorrow shortened her life. But what was the cause of this scandal? The thoughtlessness of this blinded mother. Though sincerely desirous of her son's salvation, she did not hesitate to introduce him into elegant society, where she made it a point that he should be distinguished, even if it led him into certain danger. Instead of restraint, she urged him into the ways of the world, secretly

applauding what she termed his success, which, as a Christian, she was bound to stigmatize as wrong. By these means she hoped to enable him to make a rich marriage, and to obtain a position in the world. She succeeded in making of him a bad man and a debauchee. His ardent spirit once launched upon a sea of pleasures, she was unable to guide his course, he overpassed the limits which even the world affixes, and soon plunged into the greatest excesses. With more solidity of character, this poor mother might have spared herself all the sorrows that her son heaped upon her, and especially the remorse of having been the real and guilty cause of his ruin.

You know, besides, women who, I am convinced, love God sincerely, but who, from this same levity of mind, indulge a strange weakness, the love of gaming, and have no scruple to draw into its temptations men and young women. Surely if they reflected at all, they would perceive the turpitude of this conduct, by which, if they do not go so far as to ruin these families, they nevertheless risk losses beyond the permitted limits of play, which may lead to

embarrassments with young people in their relations to their parents, and oblige them to many improper acts. With very little reflection these women would see that if these persons whom they have tempted and misled in their own houses, should in the end fall into greater excesses of gaming, and ruin themselves, they are responsible for it before God and their families.

Here is another example of this shocking thoughtlessness. A husband desires that his wife should be virtuous. Why then does he introduce her into frivolous society where the women are superficial, and the men assume a freedom of tone and manner that cannot be approved by Christians? Why, under the pretence of fashion, does he induce her to intimacy with women of doubtful morality, to form friendships with persons whom he ought scarcely to admit as acquaintances? At a later period he will be sensible of these dangerous influences: he will find by degrees, that his domestic happiness is no longer the same, that his home is less agreeable to himself, as well as to his friends. It will be fortunate if a rupture,

more or less apparent, does not ensue, but meanwhile, he has no thought of it, and if warned by a friend, he regards it with contempt. Whence this imprudent conduct? It is from levity, want of thoughtfulness. Instead of foreseeing evils in the future from the threatening aspects before him, he attends only to his amusements, and the pleasure of the moment.

And this father, with a numerous family, and little fortune to leave them, who, instead of habituating them to economy, simplicity, and the love of labor, studies only to imbue them with expensive tastes, and frivolous pastimes; what is he, notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary, but a frivolous, a very frivolous trifler? A sensible man would think of the future. He would use every endeavor to place his sons in honorable situations, and to prepare them for it; he would, in advance, train them to habits of industry, regularity, energy and docility. In place of amusements for their diversion, he would teach them the far more useful art of enduring ennui, and of overcoming it by occupation, and the judicious employment of

time. Instead of avoiding fatigue, either of mind or body, as is too often the case in our system of effeminate education, he would teach them to brave this fatigue in order to become laborious men of action. A father, faithful to his duty, would use a careful economy to increase the portion of his daughters, and, instead of accustoming them to costly dresses which consume so much money, or procuring for them the pleasures of the foolish world, the theatre and ball-room. To intoxicate their minds with a kind of life they cannot maintain, he would rear them in an honorable and dignified simplicity, without refusing the legitimate pleasures of their age, but, without giving them tastes which after his death they could no longer gratify. Unhappily, this father thinks himself a most tender parent, and entertains none of these thoughts. He lives from day to day without dreaming of the morrow, and prepares for his children a future of disappointment. His sons are without occupation, and suffer the intolerable ennui that results from their situation, and his daughters must remain in a celibacy for

which they have no taste, or enter into marriages that fail to make them happy. Is it possible to be less tender towards our children, whom we love with all our hearts?

This letter would be long, my dear friend, if I were to enumerate with you all the evil consequences of this thoughtlessness. But I close with the hope that we shall use every effort to avoid it. Let us think less of our pleasures, and more of our duties. When we are before God in prayer and meditation, let us closely examine our thoughts and inclinations, and take an account of the manner in which we look upon life, and its important events — how we appreciate vice and virtue, sin and purity of heart, — and it is impossible, with these habits, that we should fail to correct an inclination to levity or frivolity, if this be the tendency that leads us in the way of imperfection.

LETTER XX.

Superficial Devotion.

Nothing is more easy, my dear friend, than to deceive ourselves respecting the true state of our soul; and the enemy of our salvation, to hinder our progress in perfection, and even to lead us to our fall, so warps our perceptions, that we mistake within our own hearts, the nature of true piety. Because a certain religious vein is visible in our most important actions, he leads us to believe that we are in the way of holiness. From the little time that we bestow on religious practices, he induces us to conclude that our advancement is sure, for he desires nothing so much as that we should pass our lives in pride under the guise of humility, in insubordination under the veil of zeal, and sink into perdition perhaps, by sublime and extraordinary ways. Let us then endeavor to discriminate between superficial

and true devotion. I will begin by applying some tests by which we may recognize solid piety.

One of the first signs, is a lively and ardent affection for all that can contribute to the conversion of souls, and consequently to the glory of God. A Christian worthy of the name has an unfailing interest in all that touches the Church of Jesus Christ, its victories, and trials, throughout the whole world. If he be only a poor artizan, a stranger to the great movements of human things, for him it is a happiness, a joy, to learn through the *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* that at the extremities of the earth, a priest or a bishop has succeeded in planting the Gospel in thousands of souls. If he hears that at Tonquin or Gaboon a Christian has been massacred, or that a missionary died of fever while preaching Christ Jesus, his heart palpitates, not from a vain enthusiam, but with profound sympathy. He, poor and ignorant, knows that he belongs to the family of saints, to the family of the Lord Jesus, that he is a child of the Church; and wherever a Christian

triumphs or suffers, he triumphs and suffers with him, by virtue of the dogma of the communion of the saints. Truly this man's piety is solid, his devotion is sincere, for it is not in vain that we love the glory of Jesus Christ. God will always give a recompense in graces and merits of incalculable value.

Superficial devotion is indifferent to these great interests. A man of this class will declare that he has no such extent of view. He cannot undertake to occupy his thoughts with the affairs of the Church at large, nor with the Sovereign Pontiff, — with his defeats, nor successes. For him all such things are too distant, too deep. But if in his parish there is a petty affair that it would be a thousand fold better to leave to the regulation of the curate, he seizes upon it, and makes it his particular charge, his favorite hobby, and displays in it an activity worthy of a better cause. Under pretext of the good of souls, this man has no other end than to create among the members of the same parish mean and narrow rivalries; and these open the way to other and perhaps greater difficulties.

The second sign of sincere piety is a horror of sin. When a scandal occurs, it is a subject of deep affliction to the true Christian. By the sentiment of truth which is imparted by faith, he sees first the outrage perpetrated against the infinite majesty of God, and then the injury to souls resulting from it. He fears that this scandal may prevent conversions on the point of being made, that it may disturb the weak who are already sufficiently shaken by their own passions. He weeps before God, he offers up his own penances, in reparation for the scandal. It is often asked why the saints practiced, as they still do, such austerities, so many fasts, vigils, and bloody macerations. The reply is very simple to those who understand the things of God. The saints see how men outrage infinite justice, and they long to repair the evil, though they themselves are not guilty. They understand in advance the judgment and condemnation of the wicked, who are utterly regardless of their danger; and by virtue of their own immolation they hope to make satisfaction on behalf of their guilty brother, and merit for him the grace of repentance.

What is the conduct of him whose devotion is superficial, in view of this scandal? If in the facts which have been an offence to God, there is some piquant circumstance, by which the weakness of human nature may be made ridiculous, he laughs and diverts himself with a complaisance in which there is no charity, nor even a serious thought. If, on the contrary, the facts contain nothing amusing, he bursts forth with indignation against the fault that has been committed, which he might conceal, but with the excuse of branding vice, and unmasking it; he repeats it everywhere with comments and perhaps exaggeration, but always without commiseration or indulgence. He might palliate it, but he thinks no more of this, than of making amends to God for the scandal that has troubled His Church. Is this piety, a desire of perfection, or is it levity? Or, is it not rather the appearance without the reality of devotion?

A third sign of piety is the love of duty. The sincere Christian begins by a survey of the duties of the position in which Divine Providence has placed him, and devotes

an earnest zeal to fulfil them in the best manner possible. If engaged in business, he will be just, honest, rigid towards himself, never permitting his conscience to be swayed by mere interests. If a public functionary, he will admit of no negligence, no culpable weakness, be the consequences to him what they may. In his family, he will render honor and respect to his parents, and inculcate these principles upon his children; he will sacrifice pleasures and enjoyments, rest and health to the education and legitimate interests of his family. In religion above all, he will carefully perform all that is of precept, without seeking dispensations — he will practice them with all simplicity, constancy and joy, without complaining that the law of conscience, or the commands of religion are too austere, and without endeavoring to be relieved from them by vain subterfuges.

The Christian whose devotion is superficial, takes little thought of the duties of his state of life. Affecting to believe that these things are common and vulgar, and that in the Church of God there are more exalted counsels of perfection, he disdains those

which he deems of the earth, earthy, to cast himself into the sphere of illusions. His family, his public functions, the affairs entrusted to him, will be secondary things in his view, and he will attach more importance to multiplied, or extraordinary practices, which are, in fact, excellent, when in their place, and in the Divine order. To cite but one instance: would not certain mothers be more in the line of their duty, if, instead of passing whole hours at church, attracted by mere curiosity, and when there is no call for it, they remained at home with their children, attended to the cares of the household, and took pains to make their homes more agreeable to their husbands? But this specious piety which is pleased only with what is exceptional, which aims at effect even without intending it, seems to them more elevated, and they despise the ordinary paths of those virtues which are solid but humbly concealed.

Another indication of true piety is to lend a willing ear to criticisms made with holy freedom. Our nature revolts from reprimands, and all that resembles them. Nothing wounds us, or humiliates our self-

love more than when others perceive our defects, and call our attention to them; even when it is done by our most intimate friends. Yet nothing can be better for us, nothing is more necessary than these affectionate and sincere criticisms. If in religious orders, there is a special means of spiritual progress, it is that which they term the *chapter*, which signifies the custom of reprimands made in the assemblies of the community, where each member learns to know what opinion he should form of himself by what others think of him, as he listens to those hard words which they call the truth. I have never thought of this precious institution without regret that there was not in the world something similar to it, and that it is applied only by the observations, usually too timid, of friendship.

Now the Christian, whose piety is sincere, grants to friendship the liberty of applying to him this bitter, but beneficent remedy of representation, of criticism. No doubt his self-love suffers by it; but he crushes, he breaks down this self-love by an effort of his will. Most probably he at first imagines that he is unfairly judged, that he has been

misunderstood; but reflection in the presence of God leads him to change his first impression. If there be a way by which he may rapidly advance in the paths of holiness, it is by docility under reproof, or blame.

With the superficial Christian all this is quite otherwise. As his piety does not reach the root of the evil that is within him, which is pride, and goes no further than exterior of devotion, he has an invincible repugnance to all that is not entirely of his way of thinking. If spoken to with frankness, he is irritated, regards it as an insult, and renders this plainness in future, impossible. Thus he has no voice of warning beyond the hard lessons of experience, or the consequences of his own faults.

Therefore, my dear friend, let us reject that superficial devotion which honors God only with the lips, or, according to the prophet, rends its garments alone; and let us devote ourselves to that which serves God with the whole heart, and melts the soul in penitence. To attain it, we will cultivate a love for our tender and neglected mother, the Church, by prayers and

spiritual reading, and draw from meditations on the Gospels, and lives of the saints an invincible horror of sin. Let us apply ourselves to the duties of our state, and not to the devotions of fancy or fashion. Finally, let us be thankful when we are blamed, and our faults and defects pointed out to us. This is the surest way of correcting them, for we never know so well as others how weak we are, and deserving of criticism. All this is indeed not the work of a day, but with courage, good will, and the grace of God, nothing is impossible.

LETTER XXI.

Life Without Rule.

A man of sense said to me one day in jest, that among petty faults inexactitude was one of the greatest. I think, my dear friend, that he gave expression to a serious truth. To a superficial thinker there is no great honor in doing a little sooner or later a thing indifferent in itself, or in choosing at your pleasure an hour for your occupation or leisure, for your exercises of piety or relaxation, instead of fixing them in advance, and in some sort invariably. This freeness of life, this spontaneity of spirit, has a great charm for ardent imaginations, and seems even to double their strength and stimulate their energy. Nevertheless it becomes dangerous when this disorder and carelessness are habitual, as it happens with so many persons.

"I see with pain," wrote Father Lacordaire to one of his young friends, "that

your studies are not well conducted. By reading as you do, at random, without regularity, or order, or object, you lose precious time, and more than this, you lose the habit of real work, which is a great misfortune for the mind. * * * * * Whatever you do, do it with order and preseverance. I would rather see you read nothing than read at random."[1] This counsel, given for study, should be applied to the whole life. If we pray without order, if we perform our duties without the spirit of order, if, in place of arranging our occupations, we leave them to chance, we can scarcely avoid falling into serious embarrassment; and it will involve no loss of time if we examine the subject at length. We will begin with the disadvantages of unregulated habits, that we may endeavor to avoid them. In the first place, time without order is almost necessarily wasted time. The man who knows not how to dispose of his hours, who does by chance one thing or another, resembles those men of business, who leave on their table, pellmell, papers of all kinds belonging to different affairs,

[1] Letters of Rev. Father Lacordaire to young persons; letter XI., page 120.

and who consume half their time in searching for one piece, then another, and when at length they have found all they wanted, are in danger of losing them again amid the confused mass. To put an end to this imbroglio, and place everything in order once for all, half a day would often suffice. They would thus be released from long and tiresome researches that weary the mind, break up the chain of thought, and treble at least the duration of their work. But by an inexcusable indolence they put off this necessary classification for another time, and their days are wasted and dissipated. Is not the life of many passed after this manner? Their entire day, far more, their existence, is encumbered by affairs undertaken all at once, and left to chances of the first caprice; they go from one to another, from this to that, in breathless haste, always fatigued, commencing all, concluding nothing; or perhaps using two hours when two minutes might be sufficient, and wasting often excellent abilities simply for want of method. In the second place a life ill regulated becomes easily a life of idleness. We grow tired in

fact of expending so much effort on simple and easy things. When we see so little result, we quickly persuade ourselves that it is better to do nothing at all. As we do our work at any hour or day that caprice suggests, and not at the hour or day which is fixed by rule, we postpone our occupation sometimes for one pastime, sometimes for another, and end by postponing them until they are adjourned indefinitely. As the hour which strikes does not warn us that we must engage in such work, as the day that dawns does not bring its precise engagements, the indolence inherent to the mind of man gains ground from day to day, and labor, which ceases to be a habit, a second nature, becomes in the end disgusting, and we shake it off as a burthen too heavy to be borne. I know that this rule has its exceptions, and that there are persons who labor and act by fits and starts, yet with energy; but these exceptions are rare, and not to be relied on. I am convinced in fact, that if for two, or eight, or fifteen consecutive days, I lost the habit of work at fixed hours, I should be unable afterwards to set about it with the same ardor; that

to resume my accustomed activity would require a considerable effort, and if I continued this unregulated life during several months, I might perhaps lose forever the love of study and occupation.

In the third place, a life ill regulated or a want of punctuality, is wearisome to those who surround us. It is related of a celebrated juris-consult that he composed an entire work during the hours that he waited for his wife to be ready for dinner. I am not acquainted with the work, nor do I know whether the edition bears any indications of the circumstances under which it was composed; but it is certain that we must admire the patience, the unalterable serenity of the author. It is in fact a severe trial to those about us when we take always our own hour and not that of others, to have scarcely begun at the moment when we ought to have ended, to cause the failure of perhaps important affairs, for so poor a reason as the want of punctuality, and I must cordially praise those who, suffering under those annoying contrarieties, can yet maintain the placidity of my juris-consult.

Finally, such a life is a very considerable clog upon piety. The soul, like the body, needs, for its healthy nourishment fixed and regular hours. If sometimes exercises of piety are forgotten or omitted from the neglect of exactness, if sometimes they are hurried with imprudent haste, as if to repair lost time, we may be quite sure that they will have little constancy. One may thus practise a superficial piety, which comes as I have said, by fits and starts, but it will not be a piety that is either steady, strong, or persevering. At one time it will be of unlimited severity, the next, of deplorable indulgence. On one day there will be practices multiplied beyond measure; on the following, they may be abandoned for unworthy trifles. Nothing, therefore, is more ruinous to piety than a life without rule; a life that does not govern itself; and if each one would examine himself, I am convinced that he would find in this fault one of the great sources of his instability.

In many points of view the want of a fixed plan, or rule of life is then a grievous imperfection. Enough has been said in

this regard, and we will now turn to the means of correcting it.

The first or the principal way is to arrange some sort of daily rule of life. Spiritual directors require of those who wish to advance in piety, to make a rule for themselves; to fix their hours for prayer, pious observances, the periods at which they shall approach the sacraments. Without these means, which in appearance are quite secondary, they affirm that we are exposed to many more failures and neglects. I would propose to the Christian who desires to correct this defect in the organization of his life, to form a plan not only of his religious duties, but also for his ordinary duties and avocations.

If I perceive that my life is wasted in trifles, in occupations without order and scarcely deserving the name, my first care should be to arrange this daily rule for the employment of my time so as to fix the precise hours of rising and going to rest, for family duties, and those of charity. The more I provide in advance for the employment of my hours, and if it be possible, for my quarters of hours, the more sure

shall I be to conquer my faults. I cannot pretend that nothing will disturb this formula in any of its parts, but, as some of these obstacles are removed, I shall have a rule to lead me back again; a moment always present that will reveal my thoughts, and so long as I am faithful in this practice, I can be sure that not only will method gradualy reform my habits but that a love of occupation will become necessary to my happiness. A second mode of regulating my life is to be earnest in my employments, and if I have none, to create them. In life most people have a multitude of duties; but as these duties are not obligatory, they live as if they had none. They are the heads of families, great proprietors, employed in public functions, private industry. Instead of fulfiling their task in earnest, *con amore* as the Italians term it, they seek only to lighten their charge as much as possible; their occupations, far from being a rule of their life, are on the contrary only a source of trouble and disorder to them. This is a great fault which we should understand clearly, in order to fortify ourselves against it and correct it. Now, besides these persons

who are or ought to be occupied, there are others who have nothing to do, who live upon their income as it is familiarly termed. This class is numerous and for them life without a rule, living at haphazard is a seductive temptation. To Catholics in this category, I address myself. You are without occupation: then invent one. You are not a public functionary, become a man of letters, learn a foreign language, or science, literature or geology, the Sancrit or chemistry:—learn something. If you have not a family to provide for, take poor little ones for your family; devote yourself to works of charity, the propagandism of voluntary sacrifice. Make for yourself interests in life, and most certainly idleness will soon become as burdensome as formerly it was agreeable.

To these means, my dear friend, I will add another, which though less elevated, is not less practical. Accustom yourself by constraint, if necessary, to preserve order in all the petty details of your life. You are sometimes apt to forget your projects. Keep a memorandum to note them beforehand. Forgetfulness will be

remedied by this simple precaution. You mix pellmell all the papers you receive, and soon you know not where to find even the most important. Procure for yourself cases, in which to arrange them methodically. Organize your desk and your chamber in a way to render labor easy instead of being encumbered by the disorder of your materials; and in this way you will acquire a taste for order. Your exterior affairs being thus arranged, your interior life will gain immensely by this secondary reformation. One of my friends, a very methodical man, used to say that he judged a man by his writing desk. If this were in good order he held him in great esteem; if not, he considered him only a blunderer. We would not carry our discernment of character so far as either of these judgments, yet we cannot deny that this pleasantry is founded in justice, and that it is by the spirit of order, of perseverance, that ordinary minds are improved and that great intellects increase their energies a hundred fold. No beginner ever made a fortune unless he knew well how to keep his accounts; no

general gains important battles unless he be capable of controlling his army, even in its unimportant movements. Let us then not regard a life unregulated as a thing of small consequence. In science, as in piety, in domestic life as in public affairs, the want of order is a great obstacle. Sometimes it is surrounded by natural facilities, tenacity of purpose, but it is none the less an obstacle which it is wisdom to remove. May we succeed in doing so at least so far as we are concerned.

LETTER XXII.

Fear of Failures.

It is a great weakness, my dear friend, but common to otherwise generous minds — this fear of failure. The subjects of this defect are conscious of great and noble ideas, that it would be delightful to propagate, but they make no attempts, because it would be difficult, and they fear a repulse. They are indignant at groundless prejudice, at unjust prepossessions that paralyze the good and stimulate the bad. They wish to have these prejudices and prepossessions removed, but they dare not try to do it, because they dread a check. They admire a work of Christian charity, and appreciate its utility, but they cannot take the risk of establishing it, because its success is doubtful, and they tremble at the thought of the raillery which would accompany an abortive effort. Finally, they would convert a soul and lead it to God: they love this soul with all their hearts, and

would give their fortune, their life for it; yet they do nothing, they neither speak to it, nor urge it, nor act in any way, simply because they fear a check!

Here, my dear friend, is an imperfection which in its consequences is often serious. It is the false timidity of the good, or to speak frankly, their pusillanimity, which permits evil to increase its proportions, and renders the good so feeble and circumscribed. This fact should be fully understood. When there is courage and confidence in an undertaking, with humility if it fail, much good, which now seems impossible, will be accomplished as of itself.

To correct this foolish timidity, it will suffice to look over the history of the Church, and see all the *impossibilities*, so-called, which have been effected and are now living realities. I speak not of the establishment of the Church itself, for this fact being divine and miraculous in its origin, it would be said that we can no longer hope for the strength and grace that were given to its apostolic founders. But the life of religion is full of miracles of the secondary order, granted to confidence and

faith, and it is weakness or incredulity not to admit them.

During several ages the governments of Catholic countries have considered it their duty to separate their belief from their acts. They have regarded it as a masterpiece of policy to have sovereigns imbued with faith and piety, ruling through laws that ignore religion. Instead of continuing the conquests of the idolatrous and pagan nations, which, with the double concurrence of saints and heroes, were so eminent in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and which brought into the Church innumerable tribes in America, India and China, they scorn to make themself servants and propagators of the Church, and proclaim that Mahomet, Confucius or Brahma have equal rights with Jesus Christ, to their protection. In consequence of this desertion of the Catholic idea, the apostleship, deprived of material resources and support, becomes languid and exhausted, and impiety boasts that the hour is come when the Gospel can no longer extend itself; that it is becoming stationary and will soon retrograde, become extinct and be forgotten.

Humanly speaking, what is to be done in such a state of things? What can individual men, poor priests, or even devoted bishops do, when destitute of resources? Where is the man bold enough to take the part of Albuquerque and Louis XIV., to replace the combined action of France, Portugal and Spain, at the epoch when their efforts were most powerful for the extension of the faith. Such a thought is chimerical, every one will exclaim; yet a few women have conceived and executed it. They put together the products of their labor, for they were poor. Within a quarter of a century afterwards an important work was founded,[1] giving sustenance to all missionaries in all countries, furnishing them the material means to advance the conquest of souls and to resume the apostolic labors of evangelization which had been either abandoned or grievously straitened during the misfortunes of the eighteenth century. And the religious orders which are established,—have not all been accused of inutility, or their aims declared impracticable? When St. Vincent

[1] The Society for the propagation of the faith originated by Mlle. Jaricot at Lyons.

de Paul, in the foundation of the Sisters of Charity, proposed to give them *for their Convent, the houses of the sick; for their cells, a hired chamber; for chapel, the parish church; for cloister, the streets of the city, or the hospitals; for enclosure, obedience; for grate, the fear of God; and for their veil, holy modesty;*[1] what clamorous objections were made against such an innovation. The most experienced and holy men uttered a cry of alarm, fearful of the scandals that might prevail in this new community. But St. Vincent de Paul, so humble that he feared not failure, when he believed he was doing the will of God, would not recede before opposition, and undertook the work which St. Francis de Sales had conceived, but had thought it his duty to postpone.[2] And the event has rewarded his holy courage. Not only has his congregation prospered to the great edification of the Church, and to the immense relief of humanity, but from its example have been formed many

[1] Constitution of the Sisters of Charity.

[2] It was at first the intention of St. Francis de Sales, that the Order of the Visitation, as its name indicates, should visit the sick, as the Sisters of Charity and Sisters of Mercy do at this time.

other congregations, with the same spirit, the same work, if not the same rules; and now there is no Christian who does not understand, approve and bless this admirable institution. It would be easy, my dear friend, to multiply examples, but it would be doing you an injustice to extend further this demonstration. With these two facts renewed in other forms a thousand times in the history of the Church, we may conclude that when a good object is in view, we ought not to fear a want of success; that we should practice a holy and enterprising boldness, and when engaged in good works, no thought of personal advantage or self-love should be admitted; that we must go forward, trusting in God.

But you will perhaps reply, none are more mischievous than certain reckless souls who act without prudence, and for this reason prevent the success of the good which they pursue in all sincerity. I know it; but between pusillanimity and exaggerated zeal, between inertness and foolish temerity, there is, in all things, a middle path. I will not pause at an objection like this; for if I give it importance, there is

nothing useful, nothing truly Christian, which may not be paralyzed by the aid of such reasoning. I am content to let it pass for what it may be worth, while I recall to you certain rules which Christian wisdom has found for the limits of true zeal. To be guarded from rushing into a rash enterprise, the first requisite is to undertake nothing without due reflection. The saints have always acted with a supernatural confidence in the works they forwarded, but they acquired this confidence only after having long implored divine direction. The rule of St. Ignatius was written after the most prolonged meditations, vigils, and penances. St. Francis de Sales waited for years before deciding the vocation of the saintly de Chantal. St. Vincent de Paul, who never deviated from the ideal he had once adopted, often meditated for years upon the propriety and timeliness of his projects; and to be assured of the blessing of God he passed long hours in prayer. Prayer and reflection are then the first guarantees.

The second consists in securing the counsel of prudent persons, and especially of the

director of our conscience, who has particular graces for our guidance. The man who follows only his own impulses, who will not ask advice, or who attends to those only who agree with him, may and ought to fear a failure, for it is to be supposed that the spirit of wisdom is not with him.

A third guarantee of success is humility. Why have so many enterprises, happy in appearance, become abortive? It is that they were dictated by a secret pride, by selfish notions, under the pretence of doing the work of God; it is that a hidden passion, or a personal interest was there. Humility is protected from many checks, because she supports them in patience when God sends them — which in great part explains why saints succeed, when men of genius often fail: the first are humble, the second are proud.

Let us then, my dear friend, use those precautions that Christianity dictates, but, when these precautions have been taken, let us entertain no fears of failure. This firm and courageous attitude will double our strength, and react advantageously upon our lives. There are many things to

which the foregoing considerations might be profitably applied, but lest this letter should be immeasurably long, I will limit myself to one alone—works of charity.

These works have no worse enemy than discouragement and the fear of difficulties. Have we not often met, engaged in them, good and devoted, but timid men, whose over prudent fears paralize everything? First they fear the want of money, that their ordinary resources may fail, and, instead of counting largely on that Providence which has never been at fault, they are disturbed by the least diminution of receipts, and alarm others by their own fears. Yet I can affirm that never, to my knowledge, has a good work, conducted wisely and with confidence in God, perished for want of funds. And in support of this testimony, I could call to witness thousands of others more competent than myself, beginning with St. Vincent de Paul. Yet these timorous souls fear the least opposition. Because a word unfavorable to their work, or even a bitter criticism has been pronounced against it, all their courage is lost. If the work be organized, they will declare that it

must fail, that it is already dead; if in the way of foundation, that there is nothing to be done, the project must be relinquished. Yet how many works subsist that seem always at the point of failure! How many excellent institutions are founded even for the simplest purposes, in the midst of opposition; we might almost add, because of it.

Away then, in Christian works, with this false timidity! It is in itself, a greater danger than all exterior difficulties combined.

Let us beware, my friend, of that false prudence which many mistake for wisdom, and which is either a great mistake, or a want of humility. Without being rash, let us always endeavor to multiply pious works, and the means to aid the poor and sanctify souls. I have the conviction that God will recompense our zeal in fructifying far beyond our hopes the feeble seeds which we shall have confided to the earth.

LETTER XXIII.

Obstinacy.

While pusillanimous spirits fear the least repulse, there is, my dear friend, in another class of characters an opposite imperfection, which, though less general, is not less mischievous. I mean obstinacy.

The daughter of pride and mother of violent discussion, obstinacy is not the perseverance which the Christian should honor. It is a mingling of hardness and inflexibility, of personality and egotism, of exclusiveness and narrowness. Let us carefully examine the traits that distinguish it from proper firmness. Often, indeed, men with excellent intentions are mistaken, and much evil is the result: for no one is so obstinate in error as he who thinks it is his conscientious duty to sustain it.

Perseverance, when based upon reason and truth, is energetic in principle, but gentle in expression. As it is supported by a love of justice, it is not excitable: and

while it is grieved at the obstacles it encounters, it resists them from a sentiment of duty, and not with bitterness or passion. When its enterprises, its works or views, are criticised or persecuted, it does not give way to anger or indignation, nor return blow for blow, but suffers humiliation and contempt without anger or discouragement.

Obstinacy, on the other hand, will bear no opposition, not even a slight objection or criticism. All that is not a blind obedience to its views, is considered as an act of hostility. A friendly warning is a declaration of war. It imagines enemies to exist in every quarter who are bent on its ruin, and resists them, not with Christian mildness, but with the gall of harshness. Instead of enduring contradiction in silence, it is clamorous: the family, the parish, the city, are informed of its quarrels, and must submit to the scandal. Too often, the press is made to resound with it, and the adversaries of the Church have the pleasure of remarking these domestic conflicts and intestine divisions. Hardness and inflexibility in the struggle form the first demarcation between perseverance and obstinacy.

In the second place, one imbued with Christian perseverance, does not with secret egotism seek his own advantage. He may be engaged for years in efforts to attain his end, but he will labor for his object for itself alone, and not for the honor of victory. If auxiliaries come to his aid, bringing their talents and energy, he accepts them with joy, without entertaining the puerile fear, that they may outshine him, take the first place and have the prestige of success. The saints have loved and pursued their works with unshaken perseverance, but, as the time approached when they ought to withdraw and leave the task to others, they have always done it with a joy and humility worthy of admiration. The obstinate man sees things from another point of view. He wishes good to be done, no doubt; but the good must be for him, and by him, and as he makes what he undertakes a personal question, a point of honor in which his self-love is engaged, he is tenacious and intractable. Consequently, he suspects the intervention of others as a clog upon his influence, a diminution of his due preponderance; He is like merchants who are willing to

endure the fatigue of business, when it is for their own exclusive profit, and not to facilitate the plans of their associates or competitors. The obstinate man will, of course, be strongly addicted to party spirit and littleness; for with this tendency, men care for none but themselves and those belonging to them, laboring only with and for them, and stamping all their actions with the pitiful seal of egotism. How fatal this spirit is in families, in charitable associations, and, above all, in religion, may be seen from these indications.

Perseverance, in the third place, implies a certain breadth of view. For it is impossible to surmount obstacles with unalterable mildness but inflexible firmness, and constantly to maintain good purposes with entire disinterestedness, unless the ends pursued be great and elevated. Noble and exalted objects alone have the privilege of attracting, persevering and energetic devotion. Obstinacy, on the contrary, seems to belong to narrow minds, and by a natural instinct, it affiliates with little things, petty interests and minute points of view. Observe, my friend. the persons in whom you

discover this fault, and you will see at once that their activity is always engaged, from choice, on secondary matters. Instead of seeing things in their higher aspects, they take them, in vulgar parlance, by the little end. Not regarding them as a whole, they see only in parts, and these often the smallest. Yet for this fragment they do battle with incredible energy; they maintain quarrels without end, and suffer the most painful trials. What was Jansenism, for example, but an unparalleled obstinacy, attacking, at least in the beginning, not the most salient points of controversy on the great questions which might divide great minds but on secondary difficulties, a mere cavilling about words, which no considerations could induce them to relinquish, preferring to sacrifice the peace of the Church and the unity of faith, to shallow sophistries? Happily, obstinacy is seldom carried so far; still there have been too many examples of this tendency in the annals of the Church, and we should therefore be on our guard against it. To continue this parallel, I will add that perseverance is the friend of opportune concessions;

that in all which is not of the first necessity, it can bend and accommodate itself to the exigencies of the moment. As there are certain fundamental points, that cannot be yielded under any circumstances, it seeks a sort of compensation in conceding to enemies, and particularly to friends, all that can be accorded. Obstinacy considers the slightest concession a weakness. It resists for the sake of resistance, strives for the sake of striving, wounds for the satisfaction of inflicting a wound. And this explains how it is that perseverance succeeds, in some sort, in anything, while obstinacy overturns projects apparently the most useful and best conceived.

Finally, perseverance is attentive to counsel, and while the original idea is preserved in all its essentials, good advice is sought to modify what may be defective in the mode of developing it. And this condescension, this humility, are not the least contributors to success. Obstinacy accepts no counsel,—will not even hear it,—proceeds with ears and eyes closed, and its designs are often injured or ruined by obstacles the most easily to be avoided.

The line of demarcation is then well defined between perseverance and obstinacy. There is all the distance that separates humility from pride, foresight from improvidence, legitimate use and unreasoning abuse. When a Christian is forced to enter upon a discussion, to support a contest, he must, therefore, be careful not to mistake his obstinacy for perseverance, his inflexibility for firmness. The best may often be deceived. They have by their errors paid a tribute to human weakness, and in the family relation, in friendship, as in religious matters, their imperfection has been productive of much evil. But for Luther's obstinacy, the great separation of the sixteenth century would not have taken place, nor have plunged Europe into an abyss of calamities. If Lamennais had not been obstinate, the Church would not have grieved over the loss of a priest of the greatest genius. Fenelon, on the contrary, trod under foot all pride and obstinacy, and gave a beautiful example of submission, which is still the admiration of the world. Now, in point of mere reputation and human esteem, who would not prefer to be a Fenelon rather than a Luther or Lamennais?

What then is the remedy for obstinacy? To acknowledge it, is not sufficient; it must be conquered, and it is not the easiest of defects to remove.

To attain this end, it seems to me, that when we discover this defect to be in our nature, we should endeavor first to overcome it in the smaller matters, in which conscience is not involved. Thus, you defend your opinion with tenacity, and at all times you maintain it; for example, respecting an author whom you find detestable in style, when others pronounce him excellent. In regard to dress you prefer one kind to another; in some detail of the household, you will yield neither to father, mother, wife nor children. Begin your struggle against obstinacy in these petty conflicts. Evidently, neither honor nor faith, nor truth, are touched by these questions of a minor order; we can here be right or wrong in making concessions, without shame or violation of conscience. It may be unpleasant, but this little victory over ourselves, if it be often repeated, will surely lead to more important ones.

In the second place, we should make it a

rule on doubtful questions not to rely solely on our own judgment. I am well aware, that the mind does not love to renounce its decisions. I will even admit as a general rule, and in a certain measure, that it should not, because we ought always be true to our own convictions, and not be the unintelligent echoes of those of others. But between the man who listens to every thing, and believes the first comer, receiving any and every impression from without, and the man who listens to nothing, believes nobody but himself, and boasts of his inflexibility, reason as well as faith recognizes an immense distance. The first betrays weakness, the second self-will. The wise man places himself between these extremes. He gives his confidence not to every one; but when once given, it is not lightly withdrawn, and without accepting all from him of whom he has asked counsel, he rejects nothing in his grave and deliberate examination. Finally, if we would be no longer obstinate, let us be humble. Pride is the root of self-will, and encourages and nourishes it in the soul that strives to deliver itself from this imperfec-

tion. "What will be thought of you," it suggests to the self-willed, "if you give way even in the slightest degree? What a triumph it will be to your enemies, to those who envy you?" And with these vain thoughts, pride precipitates the willful man into a multitude of difficulties, which, by a just punishment of God, turn to his humiliation. If, on the contrary, we are humble, we voluntarily acknowledge our mistake, or assert our willingness to do it; even when not convinced, we will not contest a point, preferring silence to a painful discussion; and by a due recompense, this humility will turn to our advantage; it will preserve us from endless contention, and win for us the esteem of sensible people, at the same time that it may preserve us from faults, which in future we should deeply lament.

How excellent is humility in Christian life! We have seen it at each step in this study that we have made together. It is good for heaven; it is good even for the earth. It renders the Christian sincere, improves the faculties of man, and makes him amiable to those who live with him. Why then does the world despise humility?

Why make it a subject for ridicule and division? Why pronounce it unworthy of a free and reasonable creature? It is because the world, unhappily, listens to him who is the father of lies, and consequently the enemy of humility.

For us, who are Christians, let us love humility, and try to practise it, and we shall rejoice in the happiness it brings in its train; for humility, which prevents this fear of failure, as we have seen in our last letter, furnishes us the means of avoiding in it what is most painful, by aiding us to triumph over our obstinacy.

LETTER XXIV.

Indiscretion.

In discussing together, my dear friend, the excessive love of talking, we adverted to one phase of this imperfection, so common, and so disagreeable, which is termed indiscretion. We have seen it unveiling the secrets of friendship, esteeming lightly the most intimate communications, and sacrificing them to the desire of shining in conversation, or of being the bearer of news. We will not, therefore, consider it from these points of view to-day, but there are indiscretions of another kind, and they ought not to be omitted in the catalogue of our weaknesses.

First, then, there is a mean and egotistical indiscretion, which refers all to itself. This is the defect of many persons who, thinking only of their own interest, their own pleasure, even their comforts, are little disturbed at making themselves burdensome to their family or friends. You are

just going out on some business, when an indiscreet person enters, who has in view some plan or other: you may be sure that without heroic energy on your part, the scheme of your importunate visitor will get the better of your business. Another wishes to obtain a position for the gratification of his personal interests. He will stop at no attempt, however untimely it may be, no proceeding whatever may be the inconvenience it imposes on his friends. Others, in fine, who have no scruple in importuning their relations by demands of *service*, which means demands of money, that are often a real burden for those who suffer, yet dare not refuse. This indiscretion, accordingly as it is manifested in a greater or less degree, varies between the ridiculousness which the world justly punishes by its derision, and the indelicacy of which no Christian should allow himself to be suspected. If we recognize ourselves obnoxious to this defect, we should adopt the best means to combat it: — abnegation and the sentiment of our own dignity. If we schooled ourselves to endure ennui and privation, if, in a word, we were practiced in

self-control, instead of indulging ourselves somewhat as spoiled children, we should be preserved from many indiscretions. We often fall into this defect only because we do not overcome our imaginary wants, and we indulge these whims, because we are deficient in a lively sense of our true dignity. A man who has Christian elevation of character, is rarely indiscreet, for he will not stoop to littleness; a man who disregards his wants, is delicate, because he disdains to trouble others with that which touches only himself, or with the necessities above which he is unable to place himself.

Besides egotistical indiscretion there is also indiscretion in the pursuit of what is good, and it is perhaps more important to speak of it, since I have rarely seen the subject discussed.

When we are trying to do good by works of charity, we must first of all contribute from our own means. Before collecting from others, we must collect from ourselves. Here, at least, there is no importunity to be feared. But there are many persons, zealous in a certain way, who, it may be said, support their charities only at the public

expense. If they would retrench superfluous expenses, if they would stint themselves for charity, instead of wasting so much in luxury, they could frequently accomplish of themselves the good work they have begun—to relieve the embarrassments of a poor woman, to furnish a school, an asylum, or a country church with the subsidy needful for its progress.

These persons are indiscreet, or have but little generosity. They persevere in their enterprise, but without forgetting their own interests, and sooner than draw on their own purse, they will exhaust that of their neighbor. You may, at first, be inclined to accuse me, my friend, of being severe; but look around you, and I doubt not you will soon admit that my criticism is not unreasonable. Complaints are often made in the world, of the multiplicity of collections. I am far, as you will believe, from listening to all these objections; yet, there is some foundation for them. If certain persons were liberal in their charities, they would inflict less fatigue on the public by their begging. The poor and their charities would lose nothing by it, and their merit before God would gain immensely.

Yet this is not all — there are numerous works which evidently cannot be sustained by their promoters alone, but have need of public offerings. Now I would that in these works there was a marked distinction which should act as a safeguard for the rights of charity, and preserve it from indiscretion. Thus, so long as there is question of imperious necessity, of feeding the hungry, of clothing the naked, there can be no limit to demands, no fear of importunity. Further, when supplies are wanted for necessities still more pressing upon the Christian, for those that regard our faith,— that offer to souls the means of nourishment in divine truth, to receive it, to know it,—here there can be no limit to zeal, no fear of importunity. Above all, the poor must be fed, the ignorant must be instructed in the verities of faith, the Gospel propagated in the world, and woe to those who fail to understand it! But besides these wants, which are commands to all, there are often secondary ones, and by a capriciousness which I do not understand, these wants often take precedence of the others. For instance, you found a

house for orphans; nothing is more proper than to beg, to entreat, to fatigue yourself to gather these poor little abandoned children, who otherwise would be left in the street. But after the house has been founded for some time, and has attained a charitable reputation that assures its material success, then it happens that you are not content with what is necessary, but desire what is superfluous. Instead of resting satisfied with plain buildings, to rear the poor children in habits suitable to their condition, you wish for decorations and embellishments, which are out of place. For these the public are tormented and importuned, and more than this, they give almost more willingly than for the most urgent wants. Evidently this is an indiscretion, and if you had a truly Catholic heart you would think of the many and pressing needs of the Church for the poor, the vicious, the idolaters, and instead of absorbing for a secondary object, money which is so much more needed elsewhere, you would apply it to the real wants of charity and the apostleship.

Let us reflect upon this, my dear friend, and indulge in a little discussion. Let us

enquire of charitable persons what are the works for which they strive and beg the most. What part has the Propagation of the Faith, the Holy Infancy, the Society of St. Francis of Sales, in a word, all the great works of Catholic propagation, what part, I repeat, have these in their alms? These works being of the highest consideration in the Church, ought to occupy a large proportion in the budget of their charity; yet often they make but an insignificant figure there. How many Christians believe they have done enough in giving fifty-two cents per annum to the propagation of the faith; twelve cents to the Holy Infancy or to the Society of St. Francis de Sales? Now ask these persons for an ornament for the church, for a stole or a banner, things very good, without doubt, but which are not always indispensable, and they will give you five, six, even twenty dollars. Understand me, I am far from blaming their generosity in these instances, but I think it is not sufficiently proportioned, and if we all knew how to do good with discernment, we should be astonished at the results obtained in a short time. With a million of dollars added

annually to the revenues of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith (and what is this for a universal work) hundreds of thousands of heretics and idolaters might be converted. With a hundred thousand dollars annually, the Society of St. Francis de Sales would open a breach that would drive back the Protestant propagation. Do our Catholics think of this?

But I return to my subject and close with the last species of pious indiscretion, which looks only to the money to be obtained, without disturbing itself as to the mode of obtaining it. Do not imagine that I would in any way make allusion here to those reproaches that are mere calumnies, which represent good works and pious associations, as snares to entrap bequests and donations. I know enough of the state of these things to repel energetically such gross attacks. But it may be that certain persons engaged in these works are not quite discreet in the choice of means to secure money. Provided they have good receipts, they do not enquire whether the money comes through a sermon or by a ball; from a religious festival or a theatrical

representation; without suspecting it, and having no scruples as to consequences, they undertake to do good through evil, or at least through what leads to evil. Believe me, my dear friend, this is not right, and the works which encourage it, will sooner or later suffer the penalty. It is not a larger purse that gives prosperity to a pious association. It is devotion, zeal, abnegation; and never are these virtues more brilliant than in the bosom of poverty, never are they sustained by merely human, and consequently imperfect means.

Let us then be discreet on this point. God will bless us in proportion as we ally our zeal to Christian reserve, as we rely more on Him and less on money, on human prudence and worldly influence.

LETTER XXV.

Conclusion.

Have we then finished, my dear friend, with all the imperfections of our nature? Too evidently we have not, for our infirmities are so multiplied that large volumes would be insufficient for their adequate treatment; but it seems to me that the great lines of my subject are traced, and I fear to weary your patience. Therefore, lest I fall under the reproach directed against those authors who know not where to stop, I pause, and try to recapitulate, by drawing some general principles from all those ideas scattered throughout our long discussion.

First, and above all, it appears to me that in the Christian life we should neither discourage nor flatter ourselves. To imagine that because we believe in God, and fulfil our religious duties, we are never to fall into an imperfection, is not to know ourselves. To be discouraged, is to forget that life on earth is, in all points of view, a real

and perpetual warfare. To flatter ourselves like the Pharisee, to close our eyes on our shortcomings, and not to see the reality, is a fault not less grave, which may put a stop to all progress in religious life, if it does not lead to ruinous failures. Let us then, look upon the weak and vulnerable points in our souls, but let us not be cast down at the view of them, since we are men, subject to evil, and to sin.

In the second place, let us search out the principal sources of our imperfections, in order to oppose them more vigorously. To be explicit, I will reduce them to three: vanity, the love of ease, the dislike of labor. To triumph over these, I propose the cultivation of the three contrary virtues, simplicity and forgetfulness of self; the contempt of material enjoyment; the love of active and Christian work. It is vanity that engenders antipathies, the spirit of coterie and littleness. It is vanity that nourishes the excessive love of self; which awakens irritability and produces inconsistency of character. Rigidity, insubordination, rancour, the fear of failure, like obstinacy, all have their root in vanity, in

the desire to shine, to be obeyed, to govern. Let us then aim at simplicity of heart, abnegation, good nature. Instead of despising humility, let us lay up our ample provision of it, and we shall sap, at their base, these numerous imperfections that are so injurious to us, and so burthensome to those who surround us. The desire of ease, of being comfortable, and the love of pleasure, those special maladies of our age, are not less fruitful of numerous imperfections. To these we may refer the bad use of money, the excesses of the table, and the love of riches. Has not our petty cowardice its root there, as well as those hidden idolatries which enfeeble Christian faith and maxims in our souls. If Thou, O Lord, wilt mark our iniquities who shall endure Thy principles within us? Do not our superficial devotions also proceed from that reluctance to persevering effort, which is at the foundation of our modern character? Let us practice self-denial in what concerns merely the body and its enjoyments; let us be less occupied with the life of pleasure and comfort, and we shall learn how to apply the wealth which divine Providence

may have given us for more judicious uses. We shall replace good cheer by sobriety, and the thirst of gold by a wise abnegation. Fearing less to disturb our tranquility and repose, we shall more easily vanquish our petty cowardice. Being less slavish to the body, we shall have fewer of those idolatries of the lower order which ought to humble us, and which we hide from our own eyes. By this, in a word, we shall cut off at the root these wretched failings, and become energetic Christians, prepared to meet the difficulties of our times and position. If we were less fond of our ease, of what noble efforts should not we be capable?

The dislike of work is also an imperfection that creates many others, Thoughtlessness is the most active cause of our curiosity, of our excessive love of talking, of our mental levity, and it leads to an unregulated life. Let us then love work, and banish from our hearts and habits idleness, which is a vice so common and so little understood, and we shall grow rapidly in Christian life. For me, when I see so many Christian men and women, so many grown up young people, consume their lives in

trifling, in nothings, in continual parties of pleasure or in conversations without end, without utility; when I remark the frivolity of their existence, the annihilation of so many noble qualities, I am grieved and saddened. If the good have so little influence, if they are controlled at every moment by men whom they justly despise, it is because they know not how to will, they know not how to act. While evil acts, watches, labors, good men amuse themselves at the ball or theatre, at the chase or at a race-course. While the enemies of the Church redouble their ardor for her overthrow, her children make themselves dizzy at fetes, where they risk, when they do not lose in this dissipation, their Christian love and faith. Alas, the evil done by thoughtlessness is incalculable! Would that I had a thousand pens, and a thousand voices, would that I had the eloquence of saints and orators to warn, to pray, to beseech all these indifferent Catholics who leave religion to perish in many souls, while they follow in tranquility the torrent of the age. Zeal, then, zeal, let us awaken our zeal! Such, at this day, should be the device of all who have faith!

In the third place, let us preserve as the conclusion of our correspondence, an immense indulgence for the faults of others. May it please God these letters should have made us more severe towards ourselves, and taught us to know more clearly our secret inclinations; and may it especially, and by a logical consequence, induce us to pardon in others much of their weakness of all kinds! Our poor human nature, when we examine it closely and without blindness, is a combination of defects so numerous and so contradictory, that it seems impossible not to fall on one side or another into some fault, or imperfection. It is said that every one has his defects and his good qualities, and nothing is more true; for we often fall into an imperfection by an overstrained avoidance of an opposite imperfection. Rudeness of manner, bluntness, are in many cases the reaction of a weakness that is ashamed of itself, and wishes to appear strong. Weakness, on the contrary, becomes sometimes the apparent defect of a violent nature restrained to excess. Hatred of evil and sin, if not tempered by gentleness, may assume a bitter-

ness of zeal that makes piety insupportable, at the same time that extreme mildness risks the falling into an abandonment of the imprescriptible rights of truth and faith. Now if our best sentiments have these slippery but insensible descents that incline us to instability, how is it with our evil inclinations, our rebellious and scarcely curbed passions? Let us then say mutually among Christians and brothers what the Church says for us to God: "If Thou dost unto us, O Lord, according to our works, Who shall withstand Thy judgement?" Let us pardon much in each other, and close our eyes to our reciprocal infirmities, in the hope that God and our brethern will treat us, in our turn, with indulgence. Should this result be attained, it is impossible to form a correct idea of the good that would be accomplished. For that which does most harm to the progress of religion, does not proceed from the attacks of enemies, but from the divisions, the petty rivalries, the excessive and unjust severity of her own children towards each other. But men will not see it; they feign to believe that the persons who sup-

port these views intentionally exaggerate. They insist that these miseries arise from imperceptible accidents in the general course of events, yet let them scrutinize more closely and render an exact account, and they must admit that for the most part it is the good who oppose the good, the just who fear the just; in a word, that indulgence for brethern and friends of the faith is totally wanting in the best of Christians. Let us endeavor to preserve ourselves, my dear friend, from these defects, and as a resumé of all that we have said, if we have not learned to conquer all our defects and imperfections, we have at least learned to know and feel their presence, and thus recognizing the need we have of the kind forbearance of others towards our own deficiencies, we shall be less severe, and more indulgent towards those of our neighbors. If we shall have gained nothing more than this advantage in self-knowledge, I shall not have made an unprofitable intrusion upon your patience and your indulgent friendship.

THE END.

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The Little Imperfections.
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